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EDITED BY A.NORMAN JEFFARES

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A REVIEW OF

ENGLISH LITERATURE

VOLUME TWO

NUMBER ONE

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FDITOR: A. NORMAN JEFFARES
Professor of English Literature at the University of Leeds

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Editorial

HIS number will serve to remind us of the variety there is to be found in the work of those writers loosely grouped as the mantics. They are well served by scholars. Their manuscripts I papers are investigated with minute attention, their ideas alysed, explained and evaluated. They are taught in schools and iversities with enthusiasm. They are still read with pleasure. It seems likely, however, that the treatment mocked so effecely by Mr. Stephen Potter in The Muse in Chains still survives some schools. (He remarked that Shelley came in under 'lofty calist' and 'compact of spirit' and thus: 'If his life cannot be conciled with the adolescent's picture of such a type his life is elevant.') As a result not all schoolmasters or schoolmistresses ould wish to approach a discussion of the Romantics by reading their audience Benjamin Haydon's account of the 'immortal nner' before which Lamb and the poets behaved so badly,1 so manly, ludicrously badly, to the anonymous and forgiving omptroller of Stamps. But such an approach reminds us that ese writers were not lugubrious in times as perilous and violent our own: a revolution, a European war, a hungry peace. They ould foresee neither the changed material circumstances nor the tering attitudes which would soon permit Macaulay to ask 'On hat principle is it then that when we see nothing but improveent behind us, we are to expect nothing but deterioration before

They lived through Peterloo and Shelley wrote 'The Mask of narchy', that devastating revolutionary poem created out of enerous radical rage and despair at brutal, reactionary and stupid espicion of attempts to alleviate the agonies of the poor. Byron, a the other hand, knew Mr. Eliot's later unease about the decay

¹E. V. Lucas, The Life of Charles Lamb, 1905, i. 393.

of civilisations, about the rats beneath the piles of Venice: but he could invest his elegiac sadness with beauty:

In Venice Tasso's echoes are no more, And silent rows the songless gondolier; Her palaces are crumbling to the shore, And Music meets not always now the ear: Those days are gone—but Beauty still is here. States fall—Arts fade—but Nature doth not die, Nor yet forget how Venice once was dear, The pleasant place of all festivity, The Revel of the earth—the Masque of Italy!

These men wrote out of a great capacity for appreciating life: their truth was multi-coloured. Yet their experience of life and their exploration of truth pushed beyond mere self-gratification, beyond any mere 'full development and expression of personality' so beloved of our educational cliché changers. They recorded their excitements, loves, hatreds, reveries and thoughts ardently; they were men who lived intensely, and men who gave freely. Yet it is well not to cry O Altitudo too often over them. Saintsbury's famous sarcastic examination question—'without saying the thing became a trumpet in his hands, say something relevant about Milton's sonnet'—has its points and might suggest examination questions on Wordsworth which forbid any mention of Nature in the answers.

For instead of gobbling up the Romantics once and for all in adolescence we should remember that the main course is man, not Nature, and, for a change, salute our palates also with the earthy Armagnac of their mockery and indignation, their satire and common sense. Otherwise we are in danger of cloying our palates with a stickily sentimental view of them. They deserve better of us and we will admire them more reasonably if we seek out their less hackneyed work for ourselves. Better to read Shelley's Letters in addition to Keats's, to read Byron's vibrantly emotive yet caustically discerning passages about Don Juan and Haidee, and, above all, to savour the sanity of Hazlitt, praise the controlled precision of Landor, and enjoy the wicked wit of Peacock.

An Incomplete Wordsworth Essay upon Moral Habits

GEOFFREY LITTLE

Prelude includes a full transcription of the earliest considerage like fragments of the first book, which was written in Germany the winter of 1798–99 in a notebook later used by Dorothy Wordsworth for her Grasmere Journal. The notebook also consins an incomplete essay, or incomplete draft of an essay, upon prorals, which opens with an attack upon Godwin and Paley and introduces important Wordsworthian themes.

Miss Darbishire describes the notebook thus:

J. is a small notebook used by D. W. in Germany 1798–9, and afterwards or her Grasmere Journal February 14–May 2, 1802. In it Wordsworth has written a succession of pages in blank verse which turn out to be the arliest surviving drafts of a large part of Book I of The Prelude, together with two other passages used in later books [v. 389–413; XII 47–52 (1805)]. Essems quite certain that all the entries apart from the Grasmere Journal atte from the German period. After two pages of pencil scribblings and two lank pages there follow an account in W. W.'s hand of his visit to Klopstock September 21 1798], then D.W.'s narrative of the journey from Hamburg to Goslar, and some pages of very elementary German exercises and grammar, and then the aforesaid Journal, which occupies the larger part of the book; fter this follow a fragment of a moral essay exposing the weakness of systems' such as Godwin's and Paley's; more German exercises, and lastly arrly drafts of blank verse passages corresponding with passages in The Prelude, chiefly occurring in Book I.²

Dorothy and William went to Germany, with Coleridge and Chester, on 15 September 1798, just as the first edition of *Lyrical*

¹ The Prelude (2nd ed., rev., Oxford, July 1959), pp. 633-42.

² The Prelude, xxvi.

Ballads was appearing. After a little time in Hamburg, they parted company with the others to go to Goslar, where they arrived on 6 October. They lived in 'that lifeless town', cold, cut off from society and almost without books, until the first signs of spring, when they walked to Nordhausen through the Harz forest, arriving on 27 February after a journey of about four days. The draft of Book I and the fragment upon morals may therefore be dated with certainty as between 6 October and 23 February; but in fact this period may be narrowed considerably.

The two sets of German exercises are almost certainly in Dorothy Wordsworth's hand (in any case, Wordsworth practically dropped learning German: in mid-November, Dorothy reported 'William works hard—but not very much at the German'.2') Both are of approximately the same standard, the same mistakes occurring in each. They were therefore probably written at nearly the same time, for Dorothy was a keen student, envisaging an income from translating. The last entry in the narrative of the Hamburg–Goslar journey is dated 6 October, apparently being made just a little after this date. Because elementary, both the German exercises are probably early: it follows that the moral essay, lying between them, was probably also written soon after arrival in Goslar, say at the very latest before December 1798, and more probably in October or early November.

This dating may be supported indirectly as probably December at the latest, from the letters. A letter of December or January, but probably December,³ from the Wordsworths to Coleridge, contains versions of two Lucy poems and three passages in blank verse, 'selected from the mass of what William has written'. One of these passages, the famous description of stealing the boat on

¹ See M. Moorman, William Wordsworth: The Early Years (Oxford 1957), 414, where an uncollected letter from Wordsworth to Josiah Wedgwood, dated 6 February 1799, is cited (I have not been able to trace this in the Wedgwood Museum); also Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, ed. E. de Selincourt (Oxford, 1935), 202-3; and the Isabella Fenwick note to the lines 'Written in Germany . . . 'Poetical Works, ed. E. de Selincourt (Oxford 1940-49), iv. 414.

² Collected Letters (of S.T.C.) i. 445.

³ So dated by de Selincourt, Early Letters, pp. 203-11. Moorman suggests late. December; Early Years, p. 416.

Ilswater (*Prelude* I. 372–427) occurs in what is clearly an earlier rm in the J. J. manuscript. This would put the German parts of Notebook before the *Prelude* drafts, as probably written by id-December.

Of this period of intense creative activity, Wordsworth wrote Coleridge:

I have had no books I have been obliged to write in self-defence—I should we written five times as much as I have done, but that I am prevented by an easiness of my stomach and side, with a dull pain about my heart. I have used word pain, but uneasiness and heat are words which more accurately press my feeling—at all events it renders writing unpleasant. Reading is now come a kind of luxury to me. When I do not read I am absolutely consumed thinking and feeling and bodily exertions of voice or of limbs, the conquence of those feelings.¹

This was not, the phrasing of the letter suggests, self-defence gainst physical illness, but against the inrush of recollected motion, the being consumed by thinking and feeling which was esponsible for this nervous condition. (We hear of this effect fore frequently later, both from Coleridge and from Dorothy Fordsworth in her Grasmere Journal.) Here is an early and appromptu note of the conditions of the spontaneous overflow of owerful feeling to be described in the Preface.

The incomplete fragment of a moral essay, which is concerned with the moral influences of feelings made firm as habits of feeling, distinct from 'rules', has only been published in short extracts. give here a transcript from the Notebook, now in the Words-

vorth library at Grasmere.2

'I think publications in which we formally and systematically y down rules for the actions of men [? man] cannot be too long elayed. I shall scarcely express myself too strongly when I say nat I consider such books as Mr Godwyn's Mr Paley's and

1 Early Letters, p. 204.

3 Apparently Wordsworth usually spelt Godwin's name thus—see Early

etters, pp. 156, 188, 281.

² Extracts from the essay have been published, without much comment, by Moorman, Early Years, p. 430, and by F. W. Bateson, Wordsworth: A Reinterretation, 1954, p. 185. I am indebted to the Trustees of the Wordsworth library or permission to publish this transcription.

those of the whole tribe of authors of that class as impotent to all their intended good purposes, to which I wish I could add that they were equally impotent to all bad one[s]. This sentence will, I am afraid be unintelligible. You will at least have a glimpse of my meaning when I observe that our attention ought principally to be fixed upon that part of our conduct & actions which is the result of our habits. In a strict sense all our actions are the result of our habits,-but I mean here to exclude those accidental and indefinite actions, which do not regularly and in common flow from this or that particular habit. As, for example a tale of distress is related in a mixed company, relief for the sufferers proposed. The vain man, the proud man, the avaricious man &c., all contribute, but from from [sic] very different [motives del.] feelings. Now in all the cases except in that of the affectionate and benevolent man I would call the act of giving more or less accidental-I return to our habits—Now I know no book or system of moral philosophy written with sufficient power to melt into our affections, to incorporate itself with the blood & vital juices of our minds, & thence to have an influence worth our notice in forming those habits of which I am speaking. Perhaps by the plan which these authors pursue this effect is rendered unattainable. Can it be imagined [that del.] by any man who has deeply experienced his own heart that an old habit will be foregone or a new one formed by a series of propositions, which, presenting no image to the mind can convey no feeling which has any connection with the supposed archetype or fountain of the proposition existing in human life. These moralists attempt to strip the mind of all its old clothing when their object ought to be to furnish it with new. All this is the consequence of an undue value set upon that faculty which we call reason. The whole secret of this juggler's trick [? trickery] lies, not in fitting words to things (which would be a noble employment) but in fitting things to words-I have said that these bald and naked reasonings are impotent over our habits, they cannot form [? force] them, from the same cause they are equally powerless in regulating our judgments concerning [the -ing is written over something else] & [presumably Wordsworth got to delete the &] the [the 'e' of the is written heavily and drawn to alter things to the] value of men and things.¹ They contain picture of human life they describe nothing. They in no respect table us to be practically useful by informing us how men acced in such or such situations will necessarily act, & thence tabling us to apply ourselves to the means of turning them into more beneficial course, if necessary, or of giving them new alour & new knowledge when they are proceeding as they ught.

We do not argue in defence of our good [actions mis-spelt and I.] actions we feel internally their beneficent effect; we are satisfied with this delicious sensation and even when we are called on to justify our conduct we perform the task with languor & difference. Not so when we have been unworthily employed; cen it is that we are all activity & keenness, then it is that we pair to systems of morality for arguments in defence of ourves, & rare [? rash] enough are we to find them. In this state our minds lifeless words, & abstract propositions will not be estitute of power to lay asleep the spirit of self-accusation & clude the uneasiness of repentance. Thus confirmed & commented we are prepared immediately to transgress anew, & llowing up this process we shall find that I have erred when I d that'

Iere the essay ends abruptly as five pages have been torn from e Notebook.]

Wordsworth's rejection of the Godwinian calculus of necessity hich had once—according to Hazlitt—made him advise a young adent to throw away his books and read Godwin on necessity, gether presumably with Paley's Christian rationalism, both of hich elevated reason above the feelings and passions as a moral aide, dates from much earlier than this fragmentary essay. I do be twish to debate here the question of the extent of Godwin's

So far as I can judge the sentence was originally 'regulating our judgments neerning [? men] & things': it was altered to '... concerning the value of men d things'. The difference has some significance.

Early Years, p. 261.

influence, but some mention must be made of it. The most recent brief discussions of it are those of Mrs. Moorman and Miss Darbishire. These scholars show that, after the Godwinian Guilt and Sorrow and the unpublished Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff of 1793, the poet met Godwin at least nine times between February and August 1795, and kept up the acquaintanceship in later years. (The evidence is taken from Godwin's Diaries.) Miss Darbishire suggests that it was in the period immediately after these meetings that the poet began to doubt Godwin's theories, and 'yielded up moral questions in despair':

now believing,
Now disbelieving, endlessly perplexed
With impulse, motive, right and wrong, the ground
Of moral obligation, what the rule
And what the sanction, till, demanding proof,
And seeking it in everything, I lost
All feeling of conviction, and, in fine,
Sick, wearied out with contrarieties,
Yielded up moral questions in despair.²

This, I would agree, is the despairing failure of Godwinism, rather than its desperate affirmation. But even if the process of recovery from Godwinism was slow, lasting into 1797 as Miss Darbishire believes, the assertion 'Publications [i.e. those of Godwin and Paley] in which we formally and systematically lay down rules for the actions of men cannot be too long delayed' is an assertion of what Wordsworth had believed for at least the better part of two years. What prompted the poet to draft this essay at the end of 1798 may only be guessed. It was possibly intended principally for Coleridge, about whose relations with Wordsworth during this period there is probably much that is lost; almost certainly it was intended as more than a private investigation of his own beliefs, preparatory to *The Prelude*. This much can be seen from the essay's being clearly addressed to some

¹ Early Years, pp. 262-5, 297; The Prelude, pp. 603-16. A detailed discussion is offered by F. M. Todd in Politics and the Poet, 1957, s. v. Godwin.

² The Prelude, X. 893-901. (All references are to the 1805 text.)

erson, and from its hurried and familiar manner. And it was Coleridge who, with Dorothy Wordsworth, had helped to escue the poet from his despair:

Ah! then it was That thou, most precious Friend! about this time First known to me, didst lend a living help To regulate my soul.¹

Mrs. Moorman has pointed out the resemblance of the extrardinary and slightly repellent expression, 'the blood and vital rices of our minds', to the gentle and familiar lines, 'Felt in the clood and felt along the heart' and 'vital feelings of delight'. Tintern Abbey was written just before the Wordsworths left for Germany, and Three Years She Grew was composed on the long walk from Goslar to Nordhausen.) It is to the 'beauteous forms', the images of nature of the Wye Valley, and not to books of moral philosophy, that the poet owed:

Sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind,
With tranquil restoration:—feelings too
Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,
As have no slight or trivial influence
On that best portion of a good man's life,
His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
Of kindness and of love.

This is, perhaps, the imperceptible formation of those habits from which good actions 'regularly and in common flow'. The poet recognises:

In nature and the language of the sense, The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse, The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul Of all my moral being.²

¹ The Prelude, X. 905-8.

^{2 &#}x27;Lines, Composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour, July 13, 1798.' *Poetical Works*, II. 219, ll. 27–35, 107–11.

This is close to the theme of this essay. Ethical systems offering rules of conduct allegedly discovered by the reason, are in fact powerless to influence our characteristic moral conduct. In practice we turn to them for self-justification, for formulae to quell awareness of guilt and the 'uneasiness of repentance', to clear the way for further transgression. It is at this level only that debate occurs; for Wordsworth, we do not have to argue about the goodness of actions, which is felt internally. Such good actions follow from right habits; it is, for example, the habit of affection and benevolence which assures that generosity to the distressed is genuine. The moral philosopher is, for Wordsworth, concerned only with the action itself, which may be motivated by avarice, vanity or pride. It is worth noticing here, that while Wordsworth dismisses ethical systems, believing that they aid us neither in our own conduct and in the formation of our habits, nor in the regulation of our judgements or predictions1 concerning the value of men, yet it is presumably because we cannot experience the motives and internal moral feelings of others that he suggests their habits are a test of the moral quality of their actions. Whether or not this is a better test than those of Godwin and Paley, it does at any rate replace one 'system' by another, i.e. of consistency, in so far as judgements of others are concerned. This is a discrepancy which I do not think Wordsworth noticed; but, while a real one, it should not be over-estimated in appraisal of the present essay, the significance of which is in its polemic and also its relation to other of the poet's writings.

'Habits' is an important term which obviously means very much more to Wordsworth than conventional behaviour, or mannerisms. It is, like other Wordsworthian conceptions, very much easier to grasp intuitively than to explain; but briefly, it may be said to comprehend our fundamental and consistent reactions, overt and private, to the moral environment, which are best

Godwin did write, 'Nothing can be more unreasonable than to argue, from men as we now find them, to men as they may hereafter be made'. But this was precisely what Wordsworth wished to do, to be of help to others. *Political Justice*, 1793, ii. 494; quoted in *The Prelude*, p. 611.

rmed and influenced by nature and upbringing, and not by stem-building and reasoning. It is opposed to:

the Philosophy That promised to abstract the hopes of man Out of his feelings, to be fix'd thenceforth For ever in a purer element;¹

at is, the philosophy of 'the human Reason's naked self'. The abits are at the heart of the moral life, using this adjective in the ride and unpedantic sense Wordsworth would undoubtedly have emanded. Our habits are not to be analysed and dated, traced and eassified by the 'false secondary power':

But who shall parcel out His intellect, by geometric rules, Split, like a province, into round and square? Who knows the individual hour in which His habits were first sown, even as a seed, Who that shall point, as with a wand, and say, 'This portion of the river of my mind Came from yon fountain?'2

The last of the lines just quoted bears more than a verbal resemlance to the phrase in the essay, 'the supposed archetype or countain of the proposition existing in human life'. Both the essay and this paragraph from *The Prelude* deny that a series of proposicons may define the habits, the fountains from which spring noral conduct. Reflection upon deep experience confirms that no abit may be formed or altered in such a mechanical way, for wo allied reasons. The first of these is that no image, no 'picture of human life' is presented to the mind; and it is, it is implied, through images (such as the beauteous forms of the Wye Valley) that feelings are aroused which are connected with 'the supposed rechetype or fountain of the proposition existing in human life'.

¹ The Prelude, X. 801-10; 818.

² The Prelude, II. 208-15.

The pictures of human life given in the first book of *The Prelude*, largely composed at the same time as this essay, bear witness for Wordsworth. They show:

early intercourse,
In presence of sublime and lovely Forms,
With the adverse principles of pain and joy.¹

These 'vital accidents' as Wordsworth terms them in *The Excursion*, must be experienced:

Moral truth
Is no mechanic structure, built by rule;
...But a thing
Subject, you deem, to vital accidents.²

The second of Wordsworth's reasons is that the 'juggler's trick' of the casuists attempts to be normative where it may only, and then nobly, be descriptive. It attempts to reduce moral experience to formulae (fit things to words) rather than to describe it (they *describe* nothing), which would be of practical value in the guidance and encouragement of others.

Wordsworth's profound distrust of the place of reason in ethics is similar to his admission that the appreciation of poetry is not to be taught. Early in the 1800 Preface, he refers to 'the selfish and foolish hope of reasoning him [the Reader] into the approbation of these particular Poems'. The intention of the poems may be explained and defended, but the reason cannot enforce approval. It may be said that the reflection or expression of habits of feeling, or affections, is part of the aim of the Lyrical Ballads. Of the similar term 'manners', Wordsworth wrote in a letter to Coleridge in Germany in which he compared Bürger and Burns: 'I do not so ardently desire character in poems like Bürger's, as manners, not transitory manners reflecting the

¹ The Prelude, XIII. 145-7.

² The Excursion, Works, v. 171; v. 562-6.

³ Preface to Lyrical Ballads, ed. W. J. B. Owen, Anglistica IX (Copenhagen 1957) ll. 34-35. (I cite this line-numbered edition for convenient reference.)

earisome unintelligible obliquities of life, but manners conceted with the permanent objects of nature and partaking of the inplicity of these objects ... everywhere [in Burns] you have presence of human life.' And in the Preface Wordsworth isted that the language of Lyrical Ballads, 'arising out of repeated perience [i.e. habits] and regular feelings, is a more permanent,

d a far more philosophical language'.2 There has been a good deal of critical comment about Wordsorth's equation, in the Preface, of poetry and prose. For ordsworth, poetry is akin to prose because both are, or should the language of men. In one of the few rhetorical passages in Preface, Wordsworth introduces a version of the most tking figure of the essay to emphasise this kinship. Poetry 'can ast of no celestial ichor that distinguishes her vital juices from ose of prose; the same human blood circulates through the ins of them both'. Poetry, then, may present the 'picture of man life' which arouses the feelings and influences the habits: es object is truth, not individual and local, but general, and verative; not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive to the heart by passion; truth which is its own testimony... petry is the image of man and nature . . . Except this one restricon [the necessity of giving immediate pleasure] there is no object anding between the Poet and the image of things; between this, d the Biographer and the Historian, there are a thousand.' (The oral philosopher too, Wordsworth might well have added.) mong the concerns of the poet are 'the moral sentiments and imal sensations'; and genuine poetry is 'in its nature well lapted to interest mankind permanently, and likewise important the multiplicity and quality of its moral relations'.3

If I am right in linking the Preface and this essay in this way, e find here the familiar and central belief held by Wordsworth, at poetry as a moral force upon our habits touches the founins or archetypes of human life more powerfully than the

¹ Early Letters, p. 221; 27 February 1799.

² Preface, ll. 104-6.

⁸ Preface, Il. 271-3, 373-88, 493, 773-5.

publications of the whole tribe of moral philosophers. In 1804, in a rough draft of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth said of the poet:

For he is one whose habits must have needs
Been such as shall have fitted him no less
For moral greatness...
trained
To take the measure and the scale
Of moral greatness.1

¹ The Prelude, p. 621.

Act of Violence

Flight (pursuit by only fear) Beats on the pavement and invades the ear. The sagging victim, like a children's guy, Is dumped in the gutter. One pale cry Flutters a moment and is blotted out. A life has leaked away with that frail shout; The simmering night refuses to ask why Or who it was that had to die. The stiff policemen will in time appear; 'In time,' I said, but let me make it clear: In time to scent and stalk their prey, Not save the victim for a flowering day. This time tomorrow either mop or rain Will certainly have wiped away the stain That crudely signs the cold page of the street, And I shall hide my head beneath the sheet And mutter midnight spells to keep away The vision of the streetlamp's bilious ray Lighting both faces, undisguised, And recognised, and recognised.

Vernon Scannell

The Meaning of 'Kubla Khan'

GEORGE WATSON

TE now know almost everything about Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' except what the poem is about. E. H. Coleridge, ars ago, shrewdly corrected Coleridge's misdating of his own em to May 1798, and Mr. Morchard Bishop has plausibly entified the very farmhouse in Culborne, a tiny village on the merset coast, where the poet may have been interrupted in his mposition by 'a person on business from Porlock'; while edical evidence has discouraged loose talk about the creative ects of opium. All this—and, of course, J. L. Lowes's researches o Coleridge's reading in The Road to Xanadu (1927)-should we left the critic free to make a decisive interpretation in the ht of all the evidence. But, in fact, the increasing technicality Coleridge scholarship seems to have scared good criticism vay, and we are no nearer an interpretation than we were before knew the bare facts of the case. Even Humphry House, in his oleridge (1953), though he calls 'Kubla Khan' 'a triumphant sitive statement of the potentialities of poetry' (p. 116), mbles oddly in his conclusion, narrowly misses the central point the poem, and fails to show how its rigorous logic works. Taking heart from the medical evidence, which discounts the ea that opium gives rise either to dreams in sleep or to waking Illucinations, we may surely dismiss one troublesome possibility once: 'Kubla Khan' is not a dream-poem. This is not to say at Coleridge's own account of how the poem came to be ¹E. H. Coleridge (ed.) Complete Poetical Works of Coleridge, Oxford (1912) 295 n; Morchard Bishop, 'The Farmhouse of Kubla Khan', Times Literary upplement (10 May 1957); Elisabeth Schneider, Coleridge, Opium, and Kubla han, Chicago (1953), etc. E. L. Griggs, in his edition of Coleridge's letters, has ace suggested a return to 1797 as the date of 'Kubla Khan', and Miss Schneider akes a case for 1799–1800, but neither hypothesis affects my argument here.

written, in the 1816 preface, is mendacious or mistaken. It is only to assert that the dream-hypothesis does not help. The poem that we have is obviously not a dream-poem in the technical sense that Chaucer's Book of the Duchess is—or Coleridge's own poem 'The Pains of Sleep'; that is to say, it does not (except in the single detail of the damsel with the dulcimer) purport to relate the experience of a dream. Nor is it, in any helpful sense, 'dream-like'. That odd expression is usually applied to qualities that are not, in any case, clearly proper to dreams, and usually suggests something vague, shadowy, and mystical. Lowes's defence of Coleridge's story is based on an assumption that few wide-awake readers will find convincing:

Nobody in his waking senses could have fabricated those amazing eighteen [last] lines. For if anything ever bore the infallible marks of authenticity, it is that dissolving panorama in which fugitive hints of Aloadine's Paradise succeed each other with the vivid incoherence, and the illusion of natural and expected sequence, and the sense of an identity that is not identity, which are the distinctive attributes of dreams. Coleridge's statement of his experiences has more than once been called in question. These lines alone . . . should banish doubt. 1

Of course they do nothing of the kind. Even if we could admit that Lowes's dreams are like ours—or, what is more to the point, like Coleridge's—is it so clear that the last eighteen lines are vividly incoherent? They seem to me very coherent indeed. Certainly 'Kubla Khan' is a difficult poem, in the sense that it calls for careful exegesis based on a good deal of pure information about Coleridge's current preoccupations. But incoherent or muddled it certainly is not. It may sound faint praise indeed to call it one of the best organised of all Coleridge's works: more explicit, perhaps, to remark that it is one of those poems that seem all bones, so firm and self-assertive is the structure. It is not even, on the face of it (to continue the argument as if the troublesome preface did not exist), an emotionally intense poem, apart from the last half-dozen lines. Its characteristic tone is matter-of-fact, informative, even slightly technical, as if Coleridge were anxious,

¹ J. Livingston Lowes, The Road to Xanadu, 1927, p. 363.

he is in the opening section of 'The Ancient Mariner', to get is measurements right. And it is worth noticing at once that he pes get his measurements right: we are enabled and encouraged to onstruct a model, or draw a map, of the Khan's whole device, and it can be no accident that the figure 'five', mentioned in 1.6: So twice five miles of fertile ground/With walls and towers were irdled round...' is repeated in l.25: 'Five miles meandering with a mazy motion...' The walls are ten miles long, in fact, in rder to surround the five-mile stretch of the sacred river that is bove the surface of the earth. The tone is precise, almost statistial. Besides, as many critics have noticed, there is nothing fragmentary about the poem as we have it, in spite of the 1816 subtle 'A Fragment': it seems to say all it has to say. And the logical orogression of the poem is unusually good, each of its four oaragraphs being an advance upon its predecessor, and each one iightly organised within itself. All this is not to deny that Coleridge composed the poem in a dream, but only to insist that the dreamnypothesis is implausible, unhelpful, and even—in so far as it may encourage us to let down our guard and disregard what the poem s saying—a positive nuisance.

What is 'Kubla Khan' about? This is, or ought to be, an established fact of criticism: 'Kubla Khan' is a poem about poetry. It is probably the most acute poem about poetry in English, our primal example of what Mr. F. W. Bateson would call 'the Critical Muse'; and our first hint, outside his notebooks and letters, that a major critic lies hidden in the twenty-five-year-old Coleridge, waiting to get out. Those who object at once that there is not a word about poetry in the whole poem should be sent at once to the conclusion that Lowes found vividly incoherent, and asked, if they have never read any Plato, what in English

poetry it is like:

Weave a circle round him thrice, And close your eyes with holy dread, For he on honey-dew hath fed, And drunk the milk of Paradise.

There are dozens of parallels in Renaissance English to this account of poetic inspiration, all based—though not usually at first hand—

on Plato's view of poetic madness in the *Ion* or the *Phaedrus*. Theseus's banter about 'the poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling', in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, is perhaps the most famous. The 'flashing eyes' and 'floating hair' of Coleridge's poem belong to a poet in the fury of creation. Such evidence, it may be objected, is not so much conclusive as circumstantial. But it is circumstantial over such a wide area that we are bound eventually to accept it. Certainly all other interpretations are forced to leave out much of the poem. Some of them are as mad as any Platonic poet. One living critic¹ claimed that the Khan is Coleridge himself, worrying about his wife's pregnancy, and tracked down a vast amount of sexual symbolism: and Professor G. Wilson Knight's view that the poem is an allegory of human existence and Alph a 'river of life' has been influential and time-wasting. If it is not at first obvious that the conclusion of the poem is about poetic creation, no one who re-read the poem in the light of this hypothesis could ever doubt again that it was.

The prose meaning of 'Kubla Khan' is not difficult to unravel, and real difficulties only arise when we try to account for every detail in terms of its total significance. The fifty-four lines of the poem divide, very clearly, at 1.36. The first section describes, mainly in coldly literal detail, the Khan's 'rare device'. Samuel Purchas's *Pilgrimage* (1613)—the Jacobean geography-book Coleridge says he was reading when he fell asleep—tells us hardly more than that the Khan built a movable palace in a beautiful enclosed park. Coleridge is much more specific, and concentrates many of Purchas's details, and some others, into a closely consistent picture. The park is a mixture of the natural and the artificial, at once a wilderness and a garden, and what is man-made contains, or is contained in, the wild and uncontrollable:

And here were forests ancient as the hills Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

Moreover, though the whole design is of course artificial—an enclosed park centering upon a palace or 'stately pleasure-dome'.

¹ Robert Graves, The Meaning of Dreams (1924), pp. 156-8.

contains within itself, as its unique possession, something rely natural and utterly uncontrollable: the sacred river itself, the rest of its course subterranean, bursts into the light at this nt and flows violently above ground before sinking back. It is this reason, evidently, that the tyrant chose the site for his ce, which stands so close to the water that it casts its shadow in it and is within earshot of the sound of the river, both above below ground. And these two noises, we are told, harmonise:

Where was heard the mingled measure From the fountain and the caves.

th full emphasis upon the effect of contrast, the first section

The second begins on an apparently irrevelant note, but its vance is justified at once: the song of an Abyssinian girl, once rd in a dream, is capable of moving such 'deep delight' that

I would build that dome in air ...

air' presumably means as a poem, or not substantially, and the der's first instinct is to say that this is just what Coleridge has ae. But this is evidently quite wrong. Coleridge's syntax makes ery clear that the project remains unfulfilled:

And all who heard should see them there, And all should cry ...

Kubla Khan', then, is not just about poetry: it is about two ds of poem. We have one of them in the first thirty-six lines the poem; and though we do not have the other, we are told at it would do to the reader and what it would do to the poet. It is erader would be able to visualise a palace and park he had been seen; and the poet would behave after the classic manner of ets, like a madman. This second poem—the poem that does not st—is so evidently the real thing that it is clear that the poem have, in ll. 1–36, is not the real thing—not quite a poem all, in Coleridge's terms. And if we ask why Coleridge in 1798

would be likely to find ll. 1–36 unpoetical, we may find our question already answered. They are factual, detailed, matter-of-fact And we know precisely why Coleridge objected to 'matter-of-factness' in poetry—the very word, in his own view, was hi coinage. In Chapter XXII of the *Biographia Literaria*, written nearly twenty years later, he lists this very quality as the second of Wordsworth's defects as a poet:

...a matter-of-factness in certain poems...a laborious minuteness and fidelity in the representation of objects;...

This may sound rather remote from the Coleridge who wrote 'Kubla Khan'. But Hazlitt, if we may trust his evidence (it may have been conditioned by a reading of this very passage in the Biographia, which appeared in 1817), supplies us with the one detail to complete the case. In his essay 'My First Acquaintance with Poets', published in the third number of The Liberal, April 1823, he tells how Coleridge had made the same objection to some of Wordsworth's poems in a walk with Hazlitt near Nether Stowey in June 1798—or only a few weeks after the probable date of composition of 'Kubla Khan'. Coleridge, say Hazlitt:

lamented that Wordsworth was not prone enough to believe in the traditions superstitions of the place, and that there was something corporeal, a matter-of factness, a clinging to the palpable, or often to the petty, in his poetry is consequence... He said, however (if I remember right), that this objection must be confined to his descriptive pieces, that his philosophic poetry had grand and comprehensive spirit in it, so that his soul seemed to inhabit the universe like a palace, and to discover truth by intuition rather than be deduction.

Here are two kinds of poetry, and here too is evidence that the preoccupation of Coleridge's later career as a critic was alread present in the poetically fertile year of 1797–98. In a sense, it is the same question that led him, in the five years that followed, out poetry and into criticism. How far may poetry be informative or literally descriptive? Coleridge's answer, of course, is 'Ideally

t at all': information is not the business of poetry. Poetry may we an informative effect, may leave us 'sadder and wiser', as Mariner's tale leaves the Wedding Guest. But it ought not to occeed, as some of Wordsworth's lesser poems do, by a mere gregation of detail ('Tis three feet long and two feet wide'). This, at its simplest, is the point of Coleridge's imagination/fancy stinction, and there is evidence beyond Hazlitt, in Coleridge's win notebooks and letters, to show how early he hit upon it as a summary of his case for and against Wordsworth's poetry. The orly letter of 15 January 1804, addressed to Richard Sharp, ontains a full outline of the distinction:

agination, or the *modifying* power in the highest sense of the word, in which agve ventured to oppose it to Fancy, or the aggregating power.

ne classic discussion at the end of Chapter XIII of the Biographia teraria, where the 'essentially vital' power of imagination is entrasted with the 'fixities and definities' of fancy, fills out the count of a dozen years earlier. But the letter to Sharp is precise lough, and early enough, to make us feel that the young poet "Kubla Khan' may already have been close to such a conclusion. Now there are two aspects of the imagination/fancy distinction hich, obvious as they are, tend to be overlooked. The first is at it is a value-distinction. 'Imagination' is the power that rites good poems: 'fancy' writes inferior ones. There is no such ing, in Coleridgean terms, as a bad imaginative poem. If the haping spirit' really has shaped, if the poem is more than a sum its parts, more than a mere aggregate of the poet's perceptions, en it is so far a good poem. Secondly, the distinction is an istorical one: it comes from a view of the whole past of English petry, for it is precisely the great innovation of the romantic pet to write imaginative poems rather than fanciful ones, just it was the characteristic role of the Augustans to condemn nemselves to a poetry 'addressed to the fancy or the intellect' BL, ch. 1). Wordsworth, of course, is pathetically capable of oth, and the Biographia is a belated plea inviting him to recognise is excellence and his failings. And here, finally, we are faced with

an embarrassing choice between two interpretations of 'Kubla Khan'. Given that it is a poem about two kinds of poetry, and given that Coleridge's classic distinction may well have been present to him, in essence at least, as early as 1798, we need not resist the conclusion that its first thirty-six lines are 'fanciful' and the remainder a programme for imaginative creation. But I do not know that we have any clear reason for assigning the fancifulness of the first section of the poem to what Coleridge disliked in all Augustan poetry, or to what he disliked in some of Wordsworth's.

Certainly the Khan is very like an Augustan Englishman as seen through romantic eyes. The overwhelmingly important fact about his 'pleasure-dome' with its surrounding park is its artificiality. It is 'a miracle of rare device', despotically willed into existence as a tyrant's toy:

> In Xanadu did Kubla Khan A stately pleasure-dome decree . . .

The authoritarian word 'decree' is not in Purchas, who simply says: 'In Xamdu did Cublai Can build a stately palace...' And the painfully contrived quality of the tyrant's pleasure becomes clearer with every line: in the formal (though not entirely formal) gardens, and the trivial purpose to which the brute strength of the sacred river has been harnessed. We are left with a disagreeable image of the patron himself, congratulating himself on his facile ingenuity in degrading a matchless natural phenomenon to the service of a landscape garden—in itself a very Augustan pleasure¹—in order to flatter his own megalomaniac dreams:

And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far Ancestral voices prophesying war!

'In perusing French tragedies,' Coleridge remarked years later; in the first chapter of the Biographia, 'I have fancied two marks

¹ Cf. Alexander Pope, 'Windsor Forest', ll. 11–14:

Here hills and vales, the woodland and the plain,
Here earth and water seem to strive again;
Not Chaos-like together crush'd and bruis'd,
But, as the world, harmoniously confus'd.

admiration at the end of each line, as hieroglyphics of the hor's own admiration at his own cleverness.' Kubla's arronce is much alike. If only he knew it, the poem hints, he has ten off more than he can chew. For all the violence of great otional experience is there in the river, contained by the an's device as Augustan poems seem to sterilise the emotions man: 'thoughts translated into the language of poetry', as pleridge later complained of Pope. The vast power of the river Illowed to rise, but only 'momently', and then sinks back into ence, 'a lifeless ocean'. This is not the River of Life. It is the er of poetry—the poetry of imagination which, under the old Her, had been debased into a plaything and allowed its liberty By when properly 'girdled round'. The passage that describes river as it rushes above ground is dense with the imagery of the olent reshaping of dull matter, like the 'essentially vital' power the imagination working, as he later put it, in Chapter XIII of Biographia, upon objects 'essentially fixed and dead':

And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething, As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing, A mighty fountain momently was forced, Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail, Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail...

many rivers and springs of classical mythology are associated ith poetry that there is nothing remote or improbable about oleridge's imagery here. But, to look more closely, we may see the passage a premonition of his critical achievement: of the ho of the same metaphor in the 1800 preface to Lyrical Ballads hich, two years later, he made Wordsworth write ('poetry is e spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'); and of the fluid nagery to which, even in the prose of the Biographia, he felt bund to resort in defining the work of the poetic imagination, hich 'dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create'.

William Hazlitt 1778–1830

BONAMY DOBRÉE

Both from disposition and habit, I can assume nothing in word, look, or manner. I cannot steal a march upon public opinion in any way... I neglect [the] ordinary means of recommending myself to the good graces and admiration of strangers (and, as it appears, even of philosophers and friends).

('A Farewell to Essay-Writing'. Winterslow.)

Hazlitt, in fact, was an awkward customer. Talfourd and Coleridge agree in their description of his ungainly appearance, his boorishness, ascribing these social defects to intense shyness. 'His bashfulness was almost painful', Talfourd says; but when with friends, especially with Lamb, he could talk fascinatingly. And even if, according to Coleridge, 'he delivers himself of almost all his conceptions with a Forceps, yet he says more than any man I ever knew that is his own in a way of his own'. (To Thomas Wedgwood. 16 Sep. 1803.)

He wouldn't fit in; he could never belong to any literary clique or movement, and that is what still makes him an awkward customer, for now he doesn't fit in with the common conception of the Romantic Revival (in any case an absurd misnomer). Only in one respect does he seem to belong, namely in the immense enthusiasm that greeted the French Revolution, which occurred when he was a boy: here he is with Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey, and all the rest. The difference is that the splendid idea was always in his mind: all his life he was a passionate admirer of Napoleon, and he never forgave the others for, as we might put it, ratting. He would never turn Tory. It is this independence of opinion, this refusal to be carried away by those of others, that

ses him valuable to us now, as, apart from anything else, preing us from falling into the common error of regarding the nantic movement as a triumphant tide that swept everything are it.

or admire a man, when he discussed him he was not content ell the truth and nothing but the truth about him, he would ays tell the whole truth. That is why, more than from any or writer of his day, we get the sense of the time as a whole, not from some theoretical point of view. Reading, say, 'My Acquaintance with Poets', or 'On the Conversation of as', we get a vivid sense of the people as such, of how they wed and talked. Independent though he is, he is not at all asticial, nor puffed up about his unique merits; he is content two to himself:

It I mean by living to one's-self is living in the world, as in it, not of it: it if no one knew there was such a person, and you wished no one to know it: to be a spectator of the mighty scene of things... to take a thoughtful, but interest in what is passing in the world, but not to feel the slightest mation to make or meddle with it.

('On Living to One's-Self', Table Talk)

ras this attitude that enabled him to achieve that centrality of d that makes him so useful, so sane, so discriminating a mentator upon literature.

commentator rather than what we nowadays call a critic;

a brilliant one, for:

was, in the truest sense, a man of original mind; that is, he had the power pooking at things for himself, or as they really were, instead of blindly ring to, and fondly repeating what others told him what they were. He got of the go-cart of prejudice and affectation, with the learned lumber that they at their heels, because he could do without them ... He was neither a part nor a bigot ... In treating of men and manners, he spoke of them as he and them, not according to preconceived notions and abstract dogmas ... riticising books he did not compare them with rules and systems, but told us the saw to like or dislike in them.

That extract is not from an essay on Hazlitt, as it might fittingly be, but part of what he himself wrote about Montaigne ('The Periodical Essayists', The English Comic Writers). For he was not theorist, no elaborator of systems; he had 'no fangs for reconditivesearch'. In considering any work, whether of literature or painting, he asked, 'What does this mean for me, do for me? For though he paid tribute to Schlegel for his work on Shake speare, he was free of the Teutonic disease of distorting everything through transcendental or categorical lenses. He lived the literature that he read, tasting it fully, relating it to his experience as the whole man that he was. Take the opening lecture On the English Poets, 'On Poetry in General', an essay at once brillian and solid:

Impassioned poetry is an emanation of the moral and intellectual part of ou nature, as well as of the sensitive—of the desire to know, the will to act, and the power to feel; and ought to appeal to those different parts of our constitution in order to be perfect.

Or, a little later, where he touches on what we have come to cal 'the objective co-relative':

Poetry is the highest eloquence of passion, the most vivid form of expression that can be given to our conception of any thing, whether pleasurable or pain ful, mean or dignified, delightful or distressing. It is the perfect coincidence of the image and the words with the feeling we have, and which we cannot get rist of in any other way, that gives an instant 'satisfaction to the thought'.

This is all an appeal to experience, to the sense common to all ous; there are no Sidneyan showers of sweet discourse, no pretend that the poet is the unacknowledged legislator of the world, no even the more modest claims of the Preface to Lyrical Ballad. What he looks for are words and sentiments that 'come hom to the bosoms and businesses of men' (he was as fond of using that tag from Bacon as Bagehot—who in many ways resemble him—was to be); and he does not mind where, or in what form he finds it. He is no fastidious excluder, thinking that because on thing is good another must be bad. In 'A Farewell to Essay Writing' he tells of how, after a walk in his beloved country

mething having reminded him of Dryden's Theodore and

turn home resolved to read the entire poem through, and, after dinner, wing my chair to the fire, and holding a small print close to my eyes, launch the full tide of Dryden's couplets (a stream of sound), comparing his actic and descriptive pomp with the simple pathos and picturesque truth of caccio's story...

zlitt could taste both dishes with equal relish.

That is why he is so sound a guide as an appreciator, if you wish deny the name of critic to a man who can respond to so many aginative delights, knowing what he likes, and, more imporitly, why. Take some of the lectures on poetry, where he eferred to pair poets, so as to contrast their flavours, though he ses not deny himself discursive comments on other poets of the me time. A good example is his lecture on 'Dryden and Pope', which, incidentally, there is very little on Dryden to whom he ers mainly to show—and how well he does it!—in what way differs from Pope. Pope he places in the front rank of the poets art rather than of nature, and therefore deserving of a place ove the second-raters in the latter class. 'Young . . . Gray, or senside, only follow in the train of Milton and Shakespear; pe and Dryden walk by their side, though of an unequal ture, and are entitled to a first place in the lists of fame.' He is utely aware of Pope's limitations, but can thoroughly enter into delighted appraisal of his qualities, as he felt them. After noting the end of the 'Epistle to Jervas', he bursts out: 'And all we cut ourselves off from beauties like these with a theory?' milarly, in discussing 'Thomson and Cowper'—a lecture hich, it might be remarked, should, if read, dispel the silly eory one still hears bleated at intervals, that Wordsworth disvered nature—he beautifully distinguishes their qualities, and e way they feel nature. There are some remarks, too, on Crabbe, ho 'describes the interior of a cottage like a person sent there to strain for rent'. The lecture closes with some quotations from ordsworth. Or, to take another kind of instance, though as

a painter what he most admired about Spenser was his pictorial quality, he does not ignore other aspects. 'People', he says, 'are afraid of the allegory, as if they thought it would bite them.'

It was this even temper that enabled Hazlitt to welcome the work of his contemporaries, whether or no he admired them personally. He was the first popular writer to do justice to Wordsworth. Though he disliked him intensely, repelled by his monstrous egotism (as comes out again and again), he praised him highly, both in these lectures and in *The Spirit of the Age*, as 'the most original poet now living'. In the earlier essay he says:

Of many of the Lyrical Ballads it is impossible to speak in terms of too high praise, such as [he names a few] and a hundred others of inconceivable beauty, of perfect originality and pathos. They open a finer and deeper vein of feeling than any poet in modern times has done or attempted.

The later one contains as much praise, but is tempered by severe criticism of Wordsworth's narrowness of sympathy: he remarks en passant:

We do not think our author has any very cordial sympathy with Shakespear. How should he? Shakespear was the least of an egotist of any body in the world.

It was, in part, this capacity for detachment that lost him his friends—except for Lamb—and this capacity may in some degree have been a result of lost illusions, a refusal to compromise. He would not steal a march upon public opinion in any way, nor upon private. His greatest disappointment was Coleridge, leaving aside the blighting of revolutionary hopes. One thinks of his superb description of Coleridge in 'My First Acquaintance with Poets', or of a passage in 'On Going a Journey', the recognition of real genius coming in his lecture on 'The Living Poets':

... I may say of him here, that he is the only person I ever knew who answered to the idea of a man of genius. He is the only person from whom I ever learnt anything ... His genius at that time had angelic wings, and fed on manna. He talked on for ever; and you wished him to talk on for ever ...

and so on. But then we come to *The Spirit of the Age*, and Hazlitt sums up the waste of this genius, in talk rather than in writing;

Coleridge busied himself with 'vibrations and vibratiuns', how he 'lost himself in the labyrinths of the Hartz Forest the Kantean philosophy, and amongst the cabalistic names of the and Schelling and Lessing and God knows who'. There tows the cry of pain:

! 'Frailty, thy name is Genius!'—What is become of all this mighty heap ope, of thought, of learning and humanity? It has ended in swallowing so of oblivion and in writing paragraphs in the Courier. Such and so little mind of man!

ret if Coleridge, abandoning 'Liberty (the philosopher's and poet's bride) had fallen a victim . . . to the murderous praces of the hag Legitimacy', at least he had not, like Southey, wed himself to be trammelled into a poet laureate, or, like ordsworth, into a stamp-distributor. How the old dream, luding the fantasy of Pantisocracy, had vanished!

Luckily, with men of long ago, such considerations are out; akespeare is removed from all these battles. And how wholene to go back to Hazlitt on Shakespeare after reading the dite wisdom of modern commentators, each determined to ke Shakespeare the prophet of what he will, each striving to gover what, more likely than not, was never there. Shakespeare,

Hazlitt, was not a man of genius to be pondered in the study, to be encountered on the stage. (One suggests, hesitantly, that akespeare might rather have liked that.) He takes it that akespeare meant his people to mean what a spectator of his sys might suppose them to mean; Troilus is a lover, not a kind F. H. Bradley worrying about the nature of reality. For him akespeare was above all a man who loved human beings for nat they were, not as pegs upon which to hang some morality other. So in the essay on Measure for Measure 'a play as full of nius as it is of wisdom', we read:

akespear was in one sense the least moral of writers; for morality (commonly called) is made up of antipathies; and his talent consisted in sympathy with man nature, in all its shapes, degrees, depressions and elevations . . . In one use he was no moralist at all; in another he was the greatest of all moralists. In was a moralist in the sense that nature is one.

Here De Quincey is in line with him, saying in his essay on Pope: 'Poetry... can teach only as nature teaches, as forests teach, as the sea teaches, viz., by deep impulse, by hieroglyphic suggestion.' And as we read Hazlitt on Shakespeare we may feel how refreshing it is to escape from the fascinating webs woven round him for us by modern commentators, as Hazlitt escaped from those of his

Maybe Mr. J. B. Priestley is right when in his recent finely appreciative pamphlet (in the Writers and their Work Series), he prefers to call Hazlitt an essayist rather than a critic. You may, it is true, not go very deep with him as a critic, but you cannot go wrong. Certainly as an essayist he is invigorating to read, if only for the vitality of the language which so well expresses the virility of his being. And again, when writing of Montaigne, the words are applicable to him-'no juggling tricks or solemn mouthing, no laboured attempts at proving himself always in the right, and everybody else in the wrong', except, so far as the last statement goes, when he is furiously fighting his attackers, as in the splendid invective of A Letter to William Gifford, Esq.: He worked hard to evolve his manner of writing, which is a model of what such writing ought to be, 'concrete, vivid, personal, vigorous', as W. D. Howe put it. It is concise without being terse, save when he wants it to be so; a great admirer of Burke's writings, he had no objection to eloquence. He achieved this, however, by the use of the right word, not by being inflated. 'I hate to see a load of bandboxes go along the street, and I hate to see a parcel of big words without anything in them.'

Thus he can be dexterously incisive, as when he tells Gifford: 'But you are a nuisance, and ought to be abated.' Or in that splendidly modulated passage on Bentham in *The Spirit of the Age*, when he says: 'He turns wooden utensils in a lathe for exercise, and fancies he can turn men in the same manner.' That he thought about prose a good deal is plain from the admirable criticisms of Addison in 'On the Prose Style of Poets', of Johnson in 'The Periodical Essayists' (*The English Comic Writers*), apart from the disquisition 'On Familiar Style' (*Table Talk*). He

minated jargon of any kind, or any pretentiousness. He is nitely readable. True, he sometimes goes on too long, makes point too often; he quotes too much. But he is full of delightsurprises. Who would expect to find in the description of ranagh, the fives-player, such a delightful jump as 'His blows e not undecided and ineffectual—lumbering like Mr. ordsworth's epic poetry, nor wavering like Mr. Coleridge's c prose, nor short of the mark like Mr. Brougham's speeches, wide of it like Mr. Canning's wit, nor foul like the Quarterly, let balls like the Edinburgh Review' ('The Indian Jugglers', ole Talk). He is enormously varied in his subjects; he can be liantly descriptive as in his account of a boxing match ('The Int'); he is full of common sense and citizen-like acumen in his Lys on public affairs, he is penetrating in his character studies, ealing of ourselves in the essays that deal with what we might general psychology. And for those of us who pretend to be cics, the chapter 'On Criticism' should be a stimulating as well a salutary discipline.

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e next number of this Review will be published on the last Monday of ril 1961. The articles will include: 'Du Côté de Chez Waugh' by Peter een; 'L. H. Myers' by Ronald Bottrall; 'Joyce and the Artist's Fingernails' S. L. Goldberg; 'The Law Reports as Sources of English Prose' by R. F. V. uston; 'Snakes in the Grass', a study of the serpent in English poetry by tharine Garvin.

De Quincey as Literary Critic

CLIFFORD LEECH

De Quincey has in our day no reputation as a literary critic (Helen Darbishire, De Quincey's Literary Criticism, 1909, p. 7).

De Quincey's reputation as a critic, never too secure, has shrunk, along with his more general literary reputation (Sigmund K. Proctor, *Thomas De Quincey's Theory of Literature*, 1943, p. 3).

We have a striking illustration of De Quincey's characteristic tendency to indulge in intellectual libertinism (*Ibid.*, p. 27, n. 44).

His criticism is limited, and it is unreliable (John E. Jordan, *Thomas De Quincey Literary Critic: His Method and Achievement*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1952, p. 249).

In his characteristic eddyings and dallyings with the subject, De Quincey (whose reputation as a critical theorist is over-inflated) succeeds in muddying the already turbid distinction [between subjective and objective] (M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, New York, 1953, p. 143).

De Quincey, dependent on Coleridge and the Germans, has little to say that is new (René Wellek, A History of Modern Criticism: 1750–1950: The Romantic Age, 1955, p. 337).

These are not heartening words for one who wishes to evaluate De Quincey's critical writing. And, as he reads, deterrents enough will confront him. In this field, as in others, De Quincey's output was extensive: Masson devotes two of the fourteen volumes of the collected edition (1889–90) to 'Literary Theory and Criticism', but some critical essays appear in other volumes or were not included in this edition.¹ In manner he fluctuates between the magisterial and the arch, and is ever prone to a touch of vulgarity in those passages that are meant to exalt. He is often given to factual error, though this is partially due to his journalistic

¹ A list of the critical writings is given by John E. Jordan, op. cit., pp. 273-7.

the and his over-reliance on a remarkable but imperfect mory. He has a degrading love of literary gossip. He is riddled the prejudice, almost always being ready to congratulate himself at he is an Englishman, a Tory and a Christian, with serious resequences for his views on Greek and French literature. In his ambration of fundamental principles, he repeats himself and the contradicts himself and, for all his interest in philosophy, tyes us no coherent scheme.

Indeed, little of his critical writing is currently read. Most ople know, by name at least, his essay 'On the Knocking at the te in Macbeth' (1823):1 it is a serviceable small essay, bringing t the effect of contrast between the dark world of murder and everyday world that suddenly demands re-admittance, but en here we may wonder whether De Quincey has seen far ough, whether he feels the full extent of the intrusion's shock hich is consequent on our degree of involvement with the nurderers. With only slightly more substantial reservations, one uld recommend three other essays to a student: 'Theory of reek Tragedy' (1840), 2'The Antigone of Sophocles as reprented on the Edinburgh Stage' (1846),3 and 'On Wordsworth's Detry' (1845).4 The first two of these distinguish usefully if somenes too sharply between the modes of perception and presentaon characteristic of Greek and Elizabethan drama, and the third, espite some garrulity and some folly, is remarkable for its cognition of emotional complexity in certain of Wordsworth's Dems. Yet none of these could be claimed as essential reading in nglish studies today, and taken together they could not withand the generally discouraging remarks quoted at the head of nis paper.

That there is a seminal property in De Quincey's criticism is one the less the impression that is likely to result from a fairly extensive reading, and Proctor and Jordan, in the works already

¹ De Quincey, Collected Writings, ed. D. Masson, 1890, x. 389-94.

² Masson, x. 342-59.

³ Masson, x. 360-88.

⁴ Masson, xi. 294-325.

referred to, have shown themselves fully justified in each devoting a book to his critical theory and practice. Here, partly for brevity's sake, partly because the groundwork has been done, my approach will be different from theirs and may involve the distortion common in a line thickly drawn. Such an approach may still suggest that, though De Quincey may confuse as well as irritate, he can lead us to a view of literature worth some attention.

A convenient starting-point is in his essay 'Rhetoric' (1828),1 a review of Whately's Elements of Rhetoric marked by what at first seems a merely perverse strain. He puts forward the view that rhetoric is not basically concerned with persuasion or involved with the passions. The rhetorician, he argues, deals with questions that have no certain answer: the arguments for and against are so nicely balanced that a speaker's or writer's skill will momentarily turn the scale. The result will be the giving of an assent which is both purely intellectual and provisional. There will be a delight in the play of mind which has achieved this rhetorical end, but there will be no sense of a permanent commitment to the view that has been, for the time being, established. When the passions become involved (and perhaps too when a feeling of commitment ensues) De Quincey declares that 'eloquence' has taken the place of rhetoric. In its pure form, in fact, rhetoric is characterised by 'dialectical subtlety and address', as pre-eminently in Donne,2 without the implication, for either writer or reader, of an achieved truth. In noting the most gifted of rhetoricians in ancient and modern literature, however, De Quincey is forced to recognise that those he signalises for special praise-Browne, Taylor, Milton, for example—are more than rhetoricians in that they demonstrate the mind-play along with eloquence and the deeper, more permanent kind of conviction. Even in Donne, whom he sees as above all a 'rhetorical poet', he recognises also 'the most impassioned majesty'. But, though he finds a difficulty in isolating

¹ Masson, x. 81-133.

² Masson, x. 101.

³ Masson, *loc. cit.* In the essay 'Lord Carlisle on Pope' De Quincey remarks that Donne is 'a man yet unappreciated' (*Ibid.*, xi. 110). Jordan, *op. cit.*, p. 220, has noted that De Quincey's high regard for Donne is unusual in his time.

quality (his task is complicated by his desire to claim high as for rhetoric while wishing to distinguish it from the things ret greater moment), he does succeed in pointing to a literary that needs recognition. This is the exercise of an ingenuity we accept as such without any suspension of disbelief, as in a state we may cast our vote knowingly for the merely witty aker in an unimportant cause.

the distinction can be made (as De Quincey would wish it to the rhetoric here described is independent of 'style': it is cerned, rather, with the purposeful, though not ultimately ous, manipulation of thought. A similar property, however, is by him to exist within the realm of language. His long essay wle' (1840-41)1 is one of his most unsatisfactory pieces of ting-facetious without wit and digressive without point or vard—but near the beginning he chides his countrymen for sarding the matter of a book as necessarily distinct from its mner, with a consequent 'tendency to undervalue the accomhment of style'. And he suggests that in some cases matter manner are 'so inextricably interwoven as not to admit of this rse bisection'.2 All that emerges here is that style and content sometimes fused, sometimes not, and that in the latter case le is worthy of scrutiny for its own sake. The question is given ore attention in the essay called 'Language'.3 Here he distinishes between three separate relations of style and content. In first, style or 'the management of language' is seen as ranking ong the fine arts, 'and is able therefore to yield a separate ellectual pleasure quite apart from the interest of the subject ated'. Here style should not be thought of as 'secondary or pordinate' but as having 'an absolute value', comparable with at of the fine workmanship of Cellini, for example, without pect to the material within which the craftsman has worked. e argument might be improved here if De Quincey had said thout respect to the nature of the craft-object: even so, if the

Masson, x. 134-245.

Masson, x. 137-8.

Masson, x. 246-63. The date of first publication is not known: the essay was rinted in 1858 in De Quincey's Selections Grave and Gay.

object is not such as to justify the exercise of skill, our recognition of that skill may be grudging. Nevertheless, though elementary in idea and unguarded in expression, De Quincey's first type of style-content relationship is important in the body of his thinking. We may compare Wordsworth's similar recognition of delight in language itself:

Thirteen years

Or haply less, I might have seen, when first My ears began to open to the charm Of words in tuneful order, found them sweet For their own sakes, a passion and a power; And phrases pleas'd me, chosen for delight, For pomp, or love.¹

Secondly De Quincey urges that the skilful exercise of style may be necessary if the content is to prove effective: it can 'brighten the intelligibility of a subject which is obscure to the understanding' and can 'regenerate the normal power and impressiveness of a subject which has become dormant to the sensibilities'. Here De Quincey's argument seems to recall Coleridge's description of Wordsworth's purpose in the Lyrical Ballads, to awaken 'the mind's attention to the lethargy of custom' and to dissolve 'the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude'. The important point is that here style is directing the reader's mind towards an aspect of truth: its function is an ancillary and separable one, but none the less it is essential for the effect purposed.

But a third type of relation exists where style is not 'a dress or alien covering' but 'the incarnation of the thoughts'. The union here present De Quincey compares with that of body and spirit, and he adds:

Imagery is sometimes not the mere alien apparelling of a thought, and of a nature to be detached from the thought, but is the coefficient that, being superadded to something else, absolutely *makes* the thought as a *third* and separate existence.

It is characteristic of De Quincey that he does not stop to consider the nature of the 'something else' to which the imagery is 'superadded'. There is a considerable difficulty here, for as yet we lack

¹ The Prelude [1805 text], V, ll. 575-81.

² Biographia Literaria, Chap. XIV.

reffective figure to express the process involved in this kind of mposition: what we may call the primary thought-condition modified through its interaction with language, and the ultite condition of fusion is, as De Quincey claims, not reducible to -subsisting components. But if he is vague in the account of the ocess, he shows himself recurrently aware of the reciprocal ations of intellection and imagery. In the 'Rhetoric' essay he fists on the importance of 'physical analogies' in the apprehenm and detection of relationships, and the figures of Burke, he clares, are not deliberately laid on 'by way of enamel or afternament' but are to be seen as 'incarnating . . . his thoughts in agery'.1 It is worth noting the close resemblance here between terms employed in the two essays, for, while the one is tially concerned with mind-play and the other starts from the tion of the value of style per se, these two approaches lead alike the conception of an organic relationship of thought and aguage. And in a later note in the 'Rhetoric' we have a remarkle contrast made between the manners of Burke and Johnson: Burke's hands, 'every truth, ... every thesis of a sentence, ows in the very act of unfolding it'; while Johnson's sentences e 'fully preconceived', in Burke 'the preconception... ceives a new determination or inflexion at every clause of the ntence'; Johnson 'seems only to look back upon his thoughts', urke 'looks forward, and does in fact advance and change his wn station concurrently with the advance of the sentences'.2 Just De Quincey saw Burke as a rhetorician transcending minday, so he saw in him the continuous interrelation of style and ontent. The nature of the transcendence and the fusion is, it opears, bound up with the idea of 'Power' as distinct from Knowledge', these two terms constituting the best-known and erhaps the most vaguely expressed of De Quincey's dichotomies. The distinction first appears in the 'Letters to a Young Man

hose Education has been neglected' (1823)3 and is taken up

¹ Masson, x. 115.

² Masson, x. 125.

⁸ Masson, x. 9-80.

again in 'The Poetry of Pope' (1848).1 In the first instance, 'Books of Knowledge' are presented as the antithesis of 'Literature', whose function is neither to teach nor to give pleasure but 'to communicate power'. In the second, De Quincey speaks of two kinds of literature, whose separable functions 'may blend and often do so'-the literature of knowledge and the literature of power. In neither essay does he allow room for a literature which exists for the sole purpose of pleasure, despite his concern with mind-play in 'Rhetoric' and his insistence in 'Language' on the 'absolute value' possible for style. Indeed, in referring elsewhere to the effect characteristic of minor, specifically eighteenth-century, literary kinds,2 he is again close to recognising the existence of a literature of pleasure, distinct from both knowledge and power. But neither this insufficiency in the knowledge-power dichotomy nor the fact that De Quincey contradicts himself in first denying and then granting the title of 'literature' to 'Books of Knowledge' is of the first importance here. What is crucial is his conception of 'power', a property that he uniformly ascribes to literature of the highest order. In 1823 he speaks of the extension of the reader's emotional range through the activation of feelings that lie dormant without the poet's intervention: the reader, he says, is:

made to feel vividly, and with a vital consciousness, emotions which ordinary life rarely or never supplies occasions for exciting, and which had previously lain unawakened, and hardly within the dawn of consciousness—as myriads of modes of feeling are at this moment in every human mind for want of a poet to organise them.³

Specific examples follow from Lear and Paradise Lost: in the former 'I am . . . suddenly startled into a feeling of the infinity of the world within me', and in the latter the poet gives us a vital sense of 'space', which is otherwise an inert concept. Thus the reader has an increased and more heavily charged consciousness.

¹ Masson, xi. 51-97.

² 'Recollections of Charles Lamb' (1838), Masson, iii. 34–92: the passage referred to is on pp. 88–89. Proctor, op. cit., p. 169 has drawn attention to the relation between this and the other instances of De Quincey's concern with pleasure.

³ Masson, x. 48.

h of himself and of his situation in the universe. In 1848, power equated with 'deep sympathy with truth', and with 'exercise expansion to your own latent capacity of sympathy with the nite', taking the reader 'to mysterious altitudes above the nth'. 'It is,' he says, 'in relation to these great moral capacities of in that the literature of power...lives and has its field of ion.'1 Proctor2 and Jordan3 have pointed out that the termiogy has changed from a largely psychological one to a largely ical one, but the difference appears to be one of stress rather n of substance. What is basic to both accounts is the idea of rature bringing into consciousness and order tracts of exience normally unrealised: these are emotionally charged, and ir activation, according to De Quincey, has a moral effect. cause the process is one of revelation (a term that need not here we a theological sense), the effect is that of coming nearer to an ady existent 'truth'.

De Quincey thus describes 'power' in relation to what happens the mind of the reader. But, if the final effect is a clearer image truth, the power generated must be dependent on a visionary or uitive capacity in the writer's mind during its engagement with nposition: the 'growingness' characteristic of Burke's writing mportant here, as is the bringing together of style and content achieve a new entity. The condition to which literature at its thest tends is, for De Quincey, characterised by fusion and the operty of growth: the 'truth' attainable through the activating d ordering of dormant feelings is, it appears, similarly marked. e love of contrasting images simultaneously perceived, or in ch close temporal proximity as to be virtually co-existent, is a ture of his imaginative writing, and in his biography of De incey Edward Sackville West has drawn attention to his 'habit systematising his emotions into symbolical constructions, in der to make bearable what would otherwise have thrown him

Masson, xi. 55-56.

Op. cit., pp. 131, 138.

Op. cit., p. 39.

off his balance by the extreme poignancy of its attack'.¹ He made these symbolical constructions to objectify opposing impulses, and it is not surprising to find him declaring that 'the principle of antagonism' is 'a great cardinal law on which philosophical criticism, whenever it arises, must hereafter mainly depend'.² The principle is invoked in his essay 'On Milton' (1839),³ where he defends Milton's use of 'words of art', such as 'frieze, architrave, cornice, zenith', in describing 'the primitive simplicities of Paradise': he argues that 'images of architectural splendour... bring into powerful relief the depth of silence and the unpopulous solitude which possess this sanctuary of man whilst yet happy and innocent'. With this he links the description of Satan in Book I of Paradise Regained as:

an aged man in Rural weeds,
Following, as seem'd, the quest of some stray Ewe,
Or wither'd sticks to gather; which might serve
Against a Winters day when winds blow keen,
To warm him wet return'd from field at Eve. (ll. 314-18)

'The household image of old age, of human infirmity, and of domestic hearths, are all meant as a machinery for provoking and soliciting the fearful idea to which they are placed in collision, and as so many repelling poles.' Jordan points out that De Quincey does not suggest irony in the passage: he merely feels one idea more powerfully and more clearly because it co-exists with a contrasting idea. But, as Jordan recognises, there is a much closer approach to irony in his comments on certain Wordsworth poems. This comes out most fully in his recognition of the melancholy implicit in these lines from 'Stray Pleasures':

¹ A Flame in Sunlight: The Life and Work of Thomas De Quincey, 1936, p. 131. Sackville West is referring in particular to the images of death and of an intense manifestation of life that united in his recollections of his sister Elizabeth and of Catherine Wordsworth (who both died in infancy).

² 'Notes from the Pocket-Book of a late Opium-Eater' (1823-24), Masson, x. 425-55: the quotation is on p. 436.

⁸ Masson, x. 395-413.

⁴ Jordan, op. cit., p. 108.

In sight of the spires
All alive with the fires
Of the sun going down to his rest,
In the broad open eye of the solitary sky
They dance—there are three, as jocund as free,
While they dance on the calm river's breast.

Quincey's comment is:

eniably there is (and without ground for complaint there is) even here, we the spirit of gaiety is professedly invoked, an oblique though evanescent of flashed upon us of a sadness that lies deep behind the laughing figures, of a solitude that is the real possessor in fee of all things, but is waiting an or so for the dispossession of the dancing men and maidens who for that interly hour are the true, but, alas! the fugitive tenants.¹

such moments De Quincey seems close to much later critics have found a major importance in the co-existence of losed attitudes within the frame of a single piece of writing. Where he seems lacking in refinement and in exactitude is in Elemand for the simple contrast. Because, in his own response experience and in his criticism, he looked always for a polar cosition, his distinctions are commonly uneasy in application. if we are prepared to see his categories as tendencies rather a kinds, they can be valuable. Proctor has suggested that Quincey's view of rhetoric as mind-play is not remote from ain contemporary attitudes to literature:

h of literature... may be regarded as a form of experimental statement. question of the degree or kind of belief to be extended to its hypothetical esentations is probably the most vital issue in modern criticism.²

t, however, is to leave the matter too open. What literature ay seems to invite from us is a series of responses, none of an sharply cut off from the others. There is, on the most care-elevel, the delight in the hypothesis offered as such, the report experience made with all possible reservation. And from this move in the direction of slighter reservation, more intense ousness, until we reach the stage where the writer is engaged, fully as may be, with the mode of perception that he invites us 'On Wordsworth's Poetry', 1845, Masson, xi. 294–325: the passage quoted in p. 302.

Proctor, op. cit., p. 267.

to share. So, too, in his use of language: there is writing where the deft patterning of word or rhythmical unit is all that is attempted, and this gives us its own kind of pleasure. But style can, and indeed in almost any work intermittently does, move from that to be an apt conveyor and clarifier of preconceived meaning. De Quincey's third stage, too, is not likely to stand securely apart from the others: the sense of 'incarnation', of continuous interrelation of style and content (to the point where we cannot easily speak of either), is rarely constant through a writing of any length. When in literature, however, there is the sense not of an hypothesis but of 'truth', as there is in Lear, and when the thing that exists seems distinct from the writer's preconceived meaning, having grown from the union with the word, then-as for De Quincey and in the nature of things—this literature will have the complexity, the 'antagonism' of the world we most deeply know. If we are content to recognise that the phases are not sharply separable, that even within a single writing there will be fluctuations from one to another, De Quincey can sharpen our sense of the variations in our response to literature, and can help us too to value at one extreme the exercise of mind-play and the manipulation of language for simple pleasure's sake, while remembering that more important things exist.

Spring Song

Now fist, brute, with eager strength and splinter The damp and heavy lids of Winter, Fuzz in your cruelty the spikle trees, Break through their solid, black, unmoving ease, Bind them with thick colours, drag them to fruit, Push to their branches the wormfat birds mute No longer but shrilling endlessly at life's return: They skip and grin a while, waste, fail, die, burn. And spread through me swiftly, sun-season, Mild me and melt the clawfirm ice of reason.

W. H. Petty.

De Quincey On the Knocking at the Gate

GEOFFREY CARNALL

Macbeth' is a fine piece of interpretation of which we can as De Quincey said of Wordsworth's poetry, that it 'awakens illuminated consciousness ancient lineaments of truth long inbering in the mind, although too faint to have extorted ention'. It is, however, obviously the work of a nineteenth-stury critic, an admirer of Wordsworth, a connoisseur of order. The view of life suggested by the essay is strikingly ferent from that implicit in the play, and the difference is worth

loring.

De Quincey tells us that he was never able to account for the ong effect made on him by the knocking at the gate which turs after Duncan has been killed, until in 1811 a clue was evided by an incident in an appalling murder which took place the East End of London. A certain John Williams murdered nopkeeper, the shopkeeper's wife, their baby, and one of their poservants. When Williams had finished, the other servant, try, returned from an errand, and knocked at the door, quietly first, but afterwards with uncontrolled violence. The knocking is the first sign that the outer world was pressing in upon the urderer, compelling him to retreat. So in Macbeth, the knocking the gate signifies that ordinary life is resuming its sway:

human has made its reflux upon the fiendish; the pulses of life are beginning beat again; and the re-establishment of the goings-on of the world in which live first makes us profoundly sensible of the awful parenthesis that had bended them.

De Quincey, Collected Writings, ed. D. Masson, 1890, xi. 315.

In the elaborate narrative which he later wrote describing the Williams affair, De Quincey stressed the absence of natural human feeling which was evident in the murderer's very appearance. His complexion was unusually pallid, and his eyes had a frozen look. Similarly, the divine nature of love and mercy is withdrawn from Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, and the fiendish nature take its place. 'Lady Macbeth is "unsexed"; Macbeth has forgot that he was born of woman; both are conformed to the image of devils; and the world of devils is suddenly revealed.' The murders are insulated from ordinary life:

we must be made sensible that the world of ordinary life is suddenly arrested, laid asleep, tranced, racked into a dread armistice; time must be annihilated, relation to things without abolished; and all must pass self-withdrawn into a deep syncope and suspension of earthly passion.

De Quincey compares the ending of this state of insulation to the first stirrings of life after a fainting fit, or the renewal of traffic noises after the silence of a public funeral.¹

The odd thing about this interpretation is its unconcern with the most obvious immediate cause of the reverberations produced by the knocking at the gate: the sense of guilt discovered, the hint of supernatural retribution. De Quincey insists on the fiendish, demoniac character of the murderers, and this implies, not moral responsibility, but possession. The distinction can be illustrated by a comment of De Quincey's on the preacher Edward Irving. He describes Irving's roughness on one occasion in refusing alms to a beggar, and argues that this roughness did not mean that he lacked benignity. It was rather that he was overmastered by the 'demoniac fervour of his nature, the constitutional riot in his blood'.2 It is true that Shakespeare's play produces the impression that Macbeth is possessed, once he has murdered Duncan. But the original decision to murder is a real decision. He is affected by conflicting impulses: ambition to be king, the desire to stand well with public opinion, sensitivity to his wife's contempt, fear of the

¹ Masson, x. 389-94.

² Masson, iii. 122.

rality. The conflict ended in the murder of Duncan, but one is not feel that Macbeth was compelled to become a murderer. De Quincey sees this complicated play of very human motives forms of an awakening of 'the tiger spirit'. The moral reprobasing suggested in this phrase does not go deep. The language in fich he describes the insulation of the murderers from human poses, human desires, recalls the trance which is evoked in the of Wordsworth's most characteristic poetry—the 'blessed od' of *Tintern Abbey*, for example, in which, with:

even the motion of our human blood Almost *suspended*, we are *laid asleep* In body, and become a living soul.

ordsworth dwelt lovingly upon moods in which his mind was t fully awake, in which he could feel borne along by some werful but benignant impulse:

> A motion and a spirit, that impels All thinking things, all objects of all thought, And rolls through all things.

ere the insistent alls suggest a hypnotic blurring of outline, a ental condition close to falling asleep, and one not specially courable to moral decision. The same ecstatic half-consciousness ters into some of his most tenderly-recollected childhood periences in *The Prelude*, and also into his participation in the ench Revolution. The powerful impulse was not necessarily nignant. With the outbreak of war, and during the reign of eror, he was able to derive a consolation akin to that felt by the cient Prophets in their stern denunciations of the sins of the ople:

Amid the awe
Of unintelligible chastisement,
I felt a kind of sympathy with power...
Wild blasts of music thus did find their way
Into the midst of turbulent events,
So that worst tempests might be listened to.1

¹ The Prelude, 1805, X. 415-22.

A passage like this helps one to understand how Wordsworth was later able to write the notorious fourth section of the 1815 Ode, in which he describes Carnage as God's daughter, and exults in

pestilences and earthquakes.

Wordsworth is not unique in these indications of what De Quincey would have called a latent tiger spirit. A number of his contemporaries (Blake is the most respectable example) were of the Devil's party, and knew it. Even Robert Southey, that most moral of poets, and bitter enemy of 'the Satanic school of poetry', was prepared at one time to vindicate the bloody policy of Robespierre on the ground that 'a man so situated must not be judged by common laws'; while in later years he condoned what he considered to be abominable wickedness in the Marquis Wellesley because his ambition and ability were just what was needed to defeat Bonaparte.¹ In 1814, Shelley went so far as to plan and partly write a romance defending political murder, *The Assassins*. His transformation of the story of the Old Man of the Mountain has an indirect connection with De Quincey's essay on *Macbeth*, and throws some light on its attitude towards murder.

The Assassins are described by Shelley as a Christian sect, but they were in fact Muslim in origin, and flourished in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Their sheikh, the Old Man of the Mountain, carried out his policies by a system of carefully calculated murders, performed by men who were nerved for their work by a picturesque deception. Novice assassins were drugged with hashish, and while under its influence taken into the Old Man's 'paradise'. There for a time they were entertained by beautiful women. Afterwards they were drugged again and removed, whereupon it would be explained to them that they had had a glimpse of the paradise to which they would go if they died in the course of their perilous employment. Readers in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were fairly familiar with this story as an example of superstitious delusion, partly because of Voltaire's discussion of it in the *Dictionnaire philosophique*.

¹ Bodleian MS. Eng. Letters c. 22, f. 127. 22 Aug. 1794; British Museum MS. Add. 30, 928 f. 73. 6 Nov. 1806.

they came across the story in the work of Purchas, Odoricus, 'that undaunted liar, Sir John Maundeville', and used it as basis of an episode in *Thalaba*. It enters into Coleridge's *Kubla*:

And all should cry, Beware! Beware!...
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

cher the influence of opium, or of poetic fury, Coleridge has en a step towards associating assassination with physical easy. The association is explicit in the *Horrid Mysteries* of Carlosse, the romance about 'illuminist' secret societies which delighted Jane Austen's Isabella Thorpe and Thomas Love boock's Scythrop Glowry. Carlos is initiated into a society ich promotes universal happiness by means of poison and the fe, and his initiation is confirmed by ardent love-making in a schen with the beautiful Rosalia. In the course of this they drink the other's blood, an outward sign of the sensual bonds by which clos is already held to her. 'My reason and my firmest principles are totally overturned in the rapture of my senses.'

chelley's assassins are not so warm as Carlos and Rosalia, nor the valley of the assassins like the luxurious garden of tradition. Deedir and Khaled lead that life of temperate domestic happiness, as from the unease of a complex civilisation, which acquired a two poignancy amid the upheavals of the Industrial Revolution. The return the property of the mountains where they live are so beautiful as to pire them irresistibly to great heights of moral fervour. In tricular, the assassins are benevolently moved to liquidate the sets of societies less happy than their own: such pests as the pectable men whom all the city honours, smooth, smiling, lished villains, 'whose very trade is lies and murder'. The assins carry out their stern duties with 'inexpressible gentleness' denignity':

Horrid Mysteries, ed. M. Summers, 1927, chap. xii; cp. T. L. Peacock, phtmare Abbey, chap. iii.

Secure and self-enshrined in the magnificence and pre-eminence of his conceptions, spotless as the light of heaven, he would be the victim among men of calumny and persecution. Incapable of distinguishing his motives, they would rank him among the vilest and most atrocious criminals.¹

Shelley was probably thinking here of one particular assassin, John Bellingham, who on 12 May 1812 shot the British Prime Minister, Spencer Perceval. Bellingham made no attempt to escape, and behaved with considerable dignity at his trial and execution, firmly believing that he had acted as an instrument of God's justice against those who neglect the claims of the poor and oppressed. The common people of London shared this belief, and cried 'God bless you!' to him as he stood on the scaffold. Years after his death, his name was still held in honour among them. Southey was terrified that the whole country was on the verge of a war of the poor against the rich, but he acknowledged that Bellingham had something of greatness in him.²

In *The Assassins*, Shelley is trying to provide an ethical rationalisation for a mood of violence which was widespread in Britain during the latter part of 1811 and the first few months of 1812. It was a mood which expressed itself in several forms: in the Luddite outbreaks against machinery, and in the savage temper of political controversy. The most sensational acts of violence, however, were those murders committed by John Williams, which enabled De Quincey to solve the problem of the knocking at the gate in *Macheth*.

De Quincey says that Southey entered deeply into the public feeling on this occasion. He thought that the murders cast a shadow over human nature itself, and told one of his friends that he had never before experienced 'so mingled a feeling of horror, and indignation, and astonishment, with a sense of insecurity too'. De Quincey certainly shared in this feeling of insecurity, but also felt some satisfaction in Williams's exploits. Not that he

¹ Shelley, Works, ed. Ingpen and Peck, VI. 1929, 163-4.

² Gentleman's Magazine, supp. to Vol. LXXXII pt. 1 1812, 660 et seq.; Lord Holland, Further Memoirs of the Whig Party 1807–1821 1905, p. 131; Selections rom the Letters of Robert Southey, ed. J. W. Warter 1856, II, 273.

⁸ Masson, xiii. 76; Selections from the Letters of Robert Southey, ed. J. W. Warter, 1856, II, 248.

an apologist for murder in the way that Shelley was. In the Beth essay he goes to some trouble to explain that our symy with the murderer is one of comprehension, not of approon. But there is no mistaking the tremor of exhilaration with ch he describes the 'immeasurable gulf' by which Macbeth Lady Macbeth are cut off from 'the ordinary tide and ession of human affairs'. The exhilaration is even more arent in Murder considered as one of the Fine Arts, whether in the usiasm of the connoisseurs over the Thurtell case, and the parious hilarity of the Thug dinner, or in De Quincey's mn advice to an 'artist' who applied to be his servant. 'Once an indulges himself in murder', he says, 'very soon he comes Think little of robbing, and from robbing he comes next to king and Sabbath-breaking, and from that to incivility and crastination. Once begin upon this downward path, you never w where you are to stop. '1 De Quincey is tickled by the sense reedom from moral inhibitions, from the constraint of vulgar udice, which is produced by treating murder as an art. Above he is fascinated by the triumphant power of the murderer. He iks of 'the impression of awe and the sense of power left and by the strength of conception manifested' in the murder Mrs. Ruscombe.² Contemplating such things helped De incey to forget the sense of powerlessness which he found ost unbearable-a feeling which he communicates vividly in English Mail-Coach, when telling how a collision was rowly averted by his own half-strangled warning shout.

The intensity of De Quincey's horror of powerlessness may be eptional, but it is remarkable how much emphasis the poetry Wordsworth, Southey, and Shelley, for example, places upon consolation of the sense of power. If De Quincey felt the ror more acutely, it was because his experiences as a runaway in London deeply impressed his imagination with the helpless gnificance of the individual in a great city. He knew intitely a wretchedness of which others spoke from the outside,

Masson, xiii. 56.

Masson, xiii. 38.

a wretchedness which did not consist so much in particular instances 'as in the mass, the aggregate, the immensity'. No reader of the *Confessions* is likely to forget the picture conjured up of the endless terraces of Oxford Street, with the two pathetic figures of Ann and De Quincey in the lamplight. No one, says De Quincey, can be left alone in London without being aware of a sense of desertion, of utter loneliness:

No loneliness can be like that which weighs upon the heart in the centre of faces never-ending, without voice or utterance for him; eyes innumerable, that have 'no speculation' in their orbs which he can understand.²

One should not, perhaps, read too much into De Quincey's reference here to Macbeth addressing the ghost of Banquo. But it does suggest something which Macbeth and the city-dweller of the nineteenth century had in common. Macbeth's crimes have exiled him from flesh and blood. He lives in a world of phantoms. De Quincey's London is a phantom world too, not as a consequence of individual wickedness, but through the very nature of city life in the Industrial Revolution. In generalising Macbeth's experience, however, De Quincey transforms it. The peculiar wretchedness of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth is something they bring on themselves, and in spite of their dreadful power for evil, they are impotent to break down the social order from which they separate themselves. It remains intact, and reasserts itself after Macbeth's temporary usurpation. This is not at all like De Quincey's reflux of the human upon the fiendish, which recalls the passion of the mob, the sense of power that comes from acting in large numbers. When Williams was discovered in the act of carrying out his second multiple murder, the chaos and uproar of the scene, the frenzy of horror and exultation, the almost telepathic communication from street to street of the meaning of the gathering shout—all this is fervently described in the Postscript to Murder considered as one of the Fine Arts. De Quincey even uses 2 stanza from Shelley's Revolt of Islam to convey the rapture of the occasion more adequately. The ecstasy of the crowd is as demonic

¹ Fowell Buxton, speaking of social distress in London in the winter of 1816–17. See Taunton Courier, 5 Dec. 1816.

² Masson, i. 182.

This is what makes De Quincey's interpretation of *Macbeth* so phatically of the nineteenth century. As Hazlitt once remarked, spirit of that age was alien to the drama, to the intensely felt counter of individuals. The individual was dwarfed by the sheer gnitude of public affairs, and by preoccupation with abstract neiples. One might object that the Romantics did not find it ficult to imagine heroic figures, defying or mastering the 'dull asse world'. But there is an element of illusion in these heroes, they do not engage in conflict with each other. Speaking of characters in Godwin's novels, Hazlitt says that they:

we in an orbit of their own, urged on by restless thought and morbid sentint, on which the antagonist powers of sense, habit, circumstances, and nion have no influence whatever. The arguments addressed to them are idle ineffectual. You might as well argue with a madman, or talk to the winds.¹

d in *Macbeth*, a pathological condition has become normal.

Some say he's mad; others, that lesser hate him,

Do call it valiant fury.

This transformation of the moral world of Macbeth is the more iminating about the spirit of the age because, as Professor n E. Jordan has shown, in a valuable essay, 2 De Quincey is not loset critic. He is concerned with effects in the actual theatre of time. Coleridge makes penetrating observations on Macbeth's se of guilt, but his method is one of introspective analysis of text. When Hazlitt recalls Mrs. Siddons's performance of dy Macbeth, he is no more interested in moral issues than is Quincey. She seemed to have come from a higher sphere, ower was seated on her brow, passion emanated from her breast from a shrine . . . She was like a person bewildered and unnscious of what she did.'3 Such a performance would make the ne of the knocking at the gate into a sublime encounter of perhuman forces. De Quincey's essay helps us to understand nat Macbeth really meant to the London theatre-goer of the ly nineteenth century.

Hazlitt, Works, ed. P. P. Howe, 1933, XVIII. 307.

In ELH (1951).

Hazlitt, Works, ed. P. P. Howe, 1933, IV. 189-90.

Guilt and Retribution in Byron's Sea Poems

BERNARD BLACKSTONE

Nothing links Byron more decisively with the earlier generation of poets—Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge—than the emphasis he gives to the theme of sin and its punishment. The Fall motif is almost an obsession with him. We can trace it in the dramas, in Childe Harold and many of the minor poems from Mazeppa to The Vision of Judgement. In the present paper I confine myself to notes on the sea poems, in particular The Island and the

Haidee episode in Don Juan.

There is no need to establish the sea's fascination for Byron nor the fact that his verse takes on an added complexity and depth under the sway of its rhythms and images. His early reading in books of travel rivals that of Coleridge; whole passages of *Don Juan* are versified from contemporary accounts of shipwrecks, and of *The Island* he writes: 'The foundation of the following story will be found partly in Lieutenant Bligh's "Narrative of the Mutiny and Seizure of the Bounty, in the South Seas, in 1789"; and partly in "Mariner's account of the Tonga Islands"...' The sea washes through the early 'Eastern Tales', with the exception of *Lara* (a main reason, perhaps, why *Lara* is the least successful, the least resonant, of the four). And as his powers mature, we watch his vision of the sea widening and deepening. In the early poems the ocean is uncompromisingly masculine:

boundless, endless, and sublime, The image of eternity, the throne Of the Invisible . . .

Power is stressed, and sincerity: feminine weakness and guile are set against the sea's robust freedom in the first lyric of Childe

wold, I; and the theme is already there in the very early Stanzas ten in Passing the Ambracian Gulf. But with the Eastern Tales sea begins to take on its role as a complex symbol. We are in a world of stern masculinity counterpointed with a melt-femininity. The setting is classical, the tone Hebraic. All these ms revolve round Biblical axes: Eden, sin, expulsion, murder, E. In all of them a Miltonic struggle between reason and pasis presented.

uleika, in The Bride of Abydos, makes her entrance as the

nal Eve:

Fair, as the first that fell of womankind,
When on that dread yet lovely serpent smiling,
Whose image then was stamped upon her mind—
But once beguiled—and evermore beguiling . . .

Byron's antinomies meet in this description (too long to te in full); though, confessedly, in somewhat raw and atrical guise. We might suspect that the consistent Fall imagery, and in the rest of the Tales, is no more than a handy vehicle his passionate paradoxes, had we not his later poems before us. in the *Bride* itself we find significant strokes. The Wanderer—ey figure for Byron—is guided by love's star:

Aye! let me like the ocean-Patriarch roam,
Or only know on land the Tartar's home...
Bound where thou wilt, my barb! or glide, my prow!
But be the star that guides the wanderer, Thou!
Thou, my Zuleika, share and bless my bark;
The Dove of peace and promise to my ark...

the later star, dove, ark and rainbow belong to the category simple stereotypes. What is interesting is to see the feminine nciple, from which the Childe had fled, welcomed on board vessel of salvation. Byron has come to a more complex reciation of woman, the seducer and devourer, as also the four: Coleridge's Life-in-Death and Mary-Queen. Conrad, in

The Corsair, chooses impalement rather than treachery, but Gulnare saves him, by deceit and murder, despite himself. In The Island, a much more important work than any of the early Tales, and Byron's last considerable poem, Neuha is Torquil's rescuer through the medium of a beneficent sea.

We shall find the paradox stated more forcibly in *Don Juan*: more forcibly, but not more winningly than here; and if I consider *The Island* first, it is because it forges a link between *The Ancient Mariner* and *Don Juan* and makes certain comparisons possible. Coleridge's main themes are very closely paralleled, though disposed in quite a different pattern. We are still in the context of solitude, of guilt and retribution, of tormented souls adrift on a wide wide sea; but now the Fall leads to and not from Eden: 'Their sea-green isle, their guilt-won paradise.' In Coleridge's poem the central episode is played out on the 'earth's central line' under the domination of the feminine principle, in her double aspect. The centrality is there too in *The Island*, and so is the principle—in Byron's poem, naturally, much more sensuous, more 'tropical'. 'Neuha, the South Sea girl', is the prize of Torquil's rebellion; in their union the wildness of the Orkneys and of Tooboonai meet: north and south are reconciled.

Here, in this grotto of the wave-worn shore,
They pass'd the tropic's red meridian o'er;
Nor long the hours—they never paused o'er time,
Unbroken by the clock's funereal chime...
What deem'd they of the future or the past?
The present, like a tyrant, held them fast:
Their hour-glass was the sea-sand, and the tide
Like her smooth billow, saw their moments glide;
Their clock the sun, in his unbounded tow'r,
They reckon'd not, whose day was but an hour...

Certain items of Coleridge's situation are closely followed: the earth's central line, the sun 'in his unbounded tow'r', the stasis of time, and, later, the absence of twilight. The cave is a focus, or an axis: here the vertical shaft of the sun bisects the meridian. There is an escape from mechanical time into a living now—

which, however, Byron is careful to stigmatise as a 'tyrant' because it is lived purely on the natural level and holds no possibility of redemption. His pitying sense of the fragility of human life and happiness emerges, and may perhaps be called 'Christian' in its mature apprehension of strength made perfect in weakness. This reveals itself again, on the non-human plane this time, in his sketch of the nautilus:

The tender nautilus, who steers his prow,
The sea-borne sailor of his shell canoe,
The ocean Mab, the fairy of the sea,
Seems far less fragile, and, alas! more free.
He, when the lightning-wing'd tornados sweep
The surge, is safe—his port is in the deep—
And triumphs o'er the armadas of mankind,
Which shake the world, yet crumble to the wind.

Set this against Shelley's evocation of the nautilus in *The Revolt of Islam* (VII, 26): both are beautifully done, and Shelley's is the more exquisite, but Byron brings in a third dimension in the power-weakness paradox incarnate in the small creature.

The cave is indeed focal in *The Island*. 'Womb' and 'refuge' meanings run together, for the poem's theme is precisely that of an escape to the womb. Torquil is consistently spoken of as a 'boy', and the maternal aspect of Neuha's love as consistently stressed. While still on the *Bounty*, the crew look *back* to the island paradises they have left:

Young hearts, which languish'd for some sunny isle, Where summer years and summer women smile.

They prefer 'the cave Of some soft savage to the uncertain wave'. And round this focus imagination weaves a lotus-eating Eden:

The gushing fruits that nature gave untill'd; The wood without a path but where they will'd... The freedom which can call each grot a home; The general garden, where all steps may roam... It is Byron's own imagination, and longing, and anticipation; he was aging, more rapidly than his years suggest, and the island dream—which should it be? Ithaca? one of the Cyclades?—had long been with him. The Island focuses a crisis in Byron's inner life, and is all the richer and more immediate for that. Neuha represents his own ideal. She is compact of sun and sea; and if 'dusky like night', it is:

night with all her stars; Or cavern sparkling with its native spars; With eyes that were a language and a spell, A form like Aphrodite's in her shell... Such was this daughter of the southern seas, Herself a billow in her energies...

'The sun-born blood' suffuses her skin:

Like coral reddening through the darken'd wave, Which draws the diver to the crimson cave.

She is the incarnation of pure instinct, of spontaneity, beyond the mode even of Zuleika, Leila or Gulnare, for she is quite untouched by civilisation. Yet she is the representative of a tradition, a culture. When she sings to Torquil at the entrance to her cave, she draws on the poetry and music of her race. Byron is careful to stress this:

Such was this ditty of Tradition's days,
Which to the dead a lingering fame conveys...
For one long-cherish'd ballad's simple stave,
Rung from the rock, or mingled with the wave,
Or from the bubbling streamlet's grassy side,
Or gathering mountain echoes as they glide,
Hath greater power o'er each true heart and ear,
Than all the columns Conquest's minions rear...

It is characteristic of Byron to connect the traditional 'ditty' with elemental forces: and Neuha's song has its point in the total structure of the poem, it is not a simple decoration. Similarly, in the short comic episode of Ben Bunting (II, xx) the ceremony of 'crossing the line' is praised as a relic of tradition:

Still the old god delights, from out the main, To snatch some glimpses of his ancient reign.

We are here in the presence of a direct and powerful perception. The idyllic moment is followed by disaster. Retribution overtakes the mutineers in the shape of a British man-of-war; only four survivors, Christian, Torquil, Ben Bunting and Jack Skyscrape, manage to get away, in canoes piloted by friendly savages. Neuha takes her lover to a rocky islet:

The haunt of birds, a desert to mankind, Where the rough seal reposes from the wind... Here the young turtle, crawling from its shell, Steals to the deep wherein its parents dwell...

Urging Torquil to follow, she dives. The pursuing sailors wait for them to re-surface, but in vain, and after some search they withdraw. The lovers are safe in a submarine cave which Neuha has had the foresight to provision against just such an emergency. In the elaborate description given by Byron (of which I quote only a part) the rounded, pristine forms we have already seen adorning the rock are reasserted as a group of fertility emblems:

For food the cocoa-nut, the yam, the bread Borne of the fruit; for board the plantain spread With its broad leaf, or turtle-shell which bore A banquet in the flesh it cover'd o'er; The gourd with water recent from the rill, The ripe banana from the mellow hill...

And here Neuha and Torquil live until the danger has passed. In this sense the mutiny is successful. True, Torquil's three companions are killed or captured (Byron has to kill Christian off, for his rebellion is rooted in hatred of tyranny and not love of pleasure: he is the true Byronic hero, and such heroes never survive) but love is triumphant. Neuha and Torquil live to enjoy:

Their sea-green isle, their guilt-won paradise.

Not so in Don Juan. This is of course a much more complex poem, and we cannot be sure how Byron meant to complete it (if indeed he had any idea himself). What can be traced with the greatest clarity is the ubiquitous Fall theme; and here it is a progressive Fall, to be set against the sudden Fall of The Island. There is a Miltonic pity too in Don Juan: the pity that wrings our hearts at the episodes in Eden, that wrung even Satan's heart. Throughout Byron's poem we are conscious, behind the satire and the farce, of a double tenderness, a tenderness for the hero and for his victims. And from this, in part, the poem derives its peculiar obliquity. At each descent of Juan into the sensual whirlpool there is the suggestion of virtue gone out of him, of a diminished integrity. The encounter with Haidee even, with all its idyllic freshness, is an outrage. Poor Juan weathers the horrors of storm and shipwreck to be confronted with the immediate demands of a new liaison. Superb as the picture of Haidee bending over the exhausted hero is, there is something intensely predatory about it. Juan wakes to see 'A lovely female face of seventeen':

> 'Twas bending close o'er his, and the small mouth Seemed almost prying into his for breath...

The vampire touch is there. Haidee, 'the lady of the cave', is Juan's protectress, but she presents some curiously ambivalent features. 'The maid, or whatsoe'er she was' is very tall; her eyes are 'black as Death', and:

Forth from its raven fringe the full glance flies, Ne'er with such force the swiftest arrow flew; 'Tis as the snake late coiled, who pours his length, And hurls at once his venom and his strength.

We might be with Geraldine in the dark wood, or with the Belle Dame on the cold hillside. But Byron's point is this, that there is no innocence in love; he sees it, with Hardy, as 'cruel as the grave'. It demands, and in demanding it mutilates and kills. Here we have the link with Blake, and Byron's intuition delving

deeper into the stress of the contraries than does any other of his contemporaries'.

Constantly we are astonished by his insight (masked as flippancy, farce, or bawdry), into the existential dilemma. How packed with meaning, for instance, is this description of Juan's second awakening:

> He woke, and gazed, and would have slept again, But the fair face which met his eyes forbade Those eyes to close, though weariness and pain Had further sleep a further pleasure made: For Woman's face was never formed in vain For Juan, so that even when he prayed He turned from grisly saints, and martyrs hairy, To the sweet portraits of the Virgin Mary.

It is instinct with irony, and beneath irony with pathos. Juan is doomed from every point of view-even his moments of devotion are permeated with a taint which it would be inadequate to call 'sexual'. And how closely, a little later on, memories of Byron's own childhood return in the simile:

> He ate, and he was well supplied; and she, Who watched him like a mother, would have fed Him past all bounds, because she smiled to see Such appetite in one she had deemed dead.

Every phrase is ambivalent. Not only does 'like a mother' recall Mrs. Byron, but we are taken back to Paradise Lost and the Adam who:

> scrupl'd not to eat Against his better knowledge, not deceav'd But fondly overcome with Femal charm.

Adam too had 'seemed dead' to an Eve bored with the simple felicities of Eden.

A taint at the heart of nature, and of man's heart, which turns simple instinct and spontaneous passion into a guilt which must be and is visited with retribution: here we have the centre of Byron's vision to which he returns again and again. 'Our life is a false nature, 'tis not in The harmony of things' is no flourish:

it expresses a profound conviction. Thus, when the idyll reaches its consummation (for Juan, a second Fall), Byron's irony draws again on the perennial obliquity of the man-and-nature nexus:

It was the cooling hour, just when the rounded Red sun sinks down behind the azure hill... With the far mountain-crescent half-surrounded On the one side, and the deep sea calm and chill, Upon the other, and the rosy sky With one star sparkling through it like an eye.

And thus they wandered forth, and hand in hand,
Over the shining pebbles and the shells,
Gliding along the smooth and hardened sand,
And in the worn and wild receptacles
Worked by the storms, yet worked as it were planned—
In hollow halls, with sparry roofs and cells,
They turned to rest; and, each clasped by an arm,
Yielded to the deep Twilight's purple charm.

The pressure of thought through imagery is remarkable here; each detail goes to compose a unity, each visualisation is a symbol. First the image of completeness, 'circling all Nature' (in an unquoted line), within which the four elements find a unity in relationship: the rounded red sun, the mountain-crescent, the deep sea, the rosy sky. Here we have the geometry of eternity. Counterpointing this perfection, the hapless human pair, wandering forth hand in hand (the Miltonic reference is inescapable); and, ominous over it all, the divine eye.

The 'umbrageous Grots and Caves' of Paradise Lost, the 'caverns measureless to man' of Kubla Khan, symbols of a primeval and unconscious happiness, are dream foci such as we have already noted in The Island. The Haidee episode is riddled with them. There are three main cave-scenes, coming at the beginning, the middle, and the end. In the first, as we have seen, Juan lies' sleeping, watched over by the virginal, maternal and predatory Haidee, 'the lady of the cave'. Juan himself is Haidee's 'ocean-treasure'; he is 'a rich wreck', and is frequently assimilated to cave-forms by such epithets as 'wave-worn'. Their passion is

consummated against a back-cloth of 'voiceless sands and dropping caves':

Amidst the barren sands and rocks so rude, She and her wave-worn love had made their bower.

The ground-note of solemn warning which underlies all the idyllic sweetness of Milton's Eden is richly reinforced in *Don Juan* by the pervasive murmur of the sea (and, it may be remarked, Byron manipulates his stanza-form in such a way as to embody the rhythms of the sea's ebb and flow). For the sea is above all the element of Haidee's 'piratical papa' Lambro, the 'old man who lived upon the water'. This Old Man of the Sea exercises a perverted apostolate: he is a fisher of men like St. Peter, but sells his catch in the slave-market. He is to prove a Ulysses too, returning unexpectedly home. With immense virtuosity Byron weaves his strands together: we witness the magic, time-annihilating bubble of young love approached, menaced, and finally punctured by the slowly moving arrow of retribution. The situation is Hardyesque, as dramatic and as moving as *The Convergence of the Twain*.

Byron introduces his final episode—the discovery of guilt and the expulsion from Paradise—with an invocation of the Virgin Mother immediately preceding a dream of death. The pattern of *The Ancient Mariner* is again inverted, but the inversion must not distract our attention from the identity. We are in the midst of complex Fall symbolism: the Old Man of the Sea is Ulysses, is God the Father, is also Satan. While the lovers sleep after a nuptial feast he has made his way into Eden; and Haidee, like Eve, dreams

She dream'd of being alone on a sea-shore,
Chain'd to a rock; she knew not how, but stir
She could not from the spot, and the loud roar
Grew, and each wave rose roughly, threatening her ...

After a time she is released:

a dream:

and then she stray'd O'er the sharp shingles with her bleeding feet. Something, wrapped in a sheet, rolls before her; she tries to catch up with it, but cannot. Then the dream changes: she is in a cave hung with marble icicles:

And wet, and cold, and lifeless, at her feet,
Pale as the foam that froth'd on his dead brow,
Which she essay'd in vain to clear (how sweet
Were once her cares, how idle seem'd they now!)
Lay Juan...

As she gazes, his face alters into the semblance of Lambro's:

And starting, she awoke, and what to view?
Oh! Powers of Heaven! what dark eye meets she there?
'Tis—'tis her father's—fix'd upon the pair!

The sea has resumed its role as the enemy. In bringing Lambro back to the island it symbolically drowns Juan. Haidee's dream is a conflation and a reversal of all she has been through since she found her lover unconscious at the cave's mouth. In her dream she is alone; she lives the past in isolation; and in the lines:

she stray'd O'er the sharp shingles with her bleeding feet ...

we have the dream-obverse of the idyllic 'And thus they wandered forth...' Finally, the 'one star sparkling...like an eye' which kept tender watch over their love is transmogrified into the terrible gaze of Lambro.

There may be more brilliant episodes in Don Juan than this (one might name the harem scene in Canto V) but none, I think, which bears so closely and so deeply on the theme of my essay. In the harem episode we are on the Bosphorus, and the peculiar ocean resonances which are hardly less than integral to his theme are absent. The action is enclosed, the atmosphere stifling; we miss the pity and the passion. In maturing Juan grows more cynical; in passing from the Mediterranean warmth towards the Pontic cold (and later to the icy Danube and Neva) he is moving outside the sphere of sun-caressed love to the artificialities and

stuffiness of court life. It is in the Haidee episode, with its natural setting, that Byron is able to make his profoundest statement of the theme of guilt and retribution. The love of Haidee and Juan cannot survive in the world of adult experience:

for they were children still,
And children still they should have ever been;
They were not made in the real world to fill
A busy character in the dull scene,
But like two beings born from out a rill,
A nymph and her beloved, all unseen
To pass their lives in fountains and on flowers,
And never feel the weight of human hours.

Haidee dies; Juan lives to 'feel the weight of mortal hours' and remorse for Haidee's death. His responsibility is indirect, but so was the Giaour's for the murder of Leila, yet he can say:

But look—'tis written on my brow!

There read of Cain the curse and crime.

'The web of being blindly wove' none can escape; but for Byron, unlike Shelley, the blindness itself is criminal.

A REVIEW OF ENGLISH LITERATURE. Vol. II. No. 3

The July number of this Review will be published on the last Monday of the month and will be a Dickens number. The Guest Editor will be John Butt and contributors will include: Sylvére Monod, P. A. W. Collins, Arnold Kettle, Randolph Quirk, Angus Wilson and Kenneth Fielding. Topics will include Dickens's humour; Dickens's use of language; Dickens's writing for periodicals; a critical study of *David Copperfield*; a critical survey of recent Dickens criticism.

Comments on Recent Shelley Studies

G. M. MATTHEWS

NE of Shelley's discomforts as a poet was to realise how "nothing is more difficult and unwelcome than to write without a confidence of finding readers', and his wife thought later, very plausibly, that lack of contact with an audience had amplified the weaknesses in his poetry. Nowadays the chief trouble seems to lie in lack of contact between his readers and his critics. Experience suggests that, on the whole, people don't read Shelley much less than they did (though an undergraduate is sometimes wary of disclosing this 'antipathy of his sensibility to any play of the critical mind', as Dr. Leavis put it). But if they read him, they tend to do as the Victorians did, neglect the poems that meant the most to their author for the ditties of The Golden Treasury. 'We peep over the wild mask of revolutionary metaphysics, and we see the winsome face of the child', Francis Thompson explained in the 1880's. In doing this, readers show themselves quite unaffected by the complete reappraisal of Shelley, poet and man, which critical scholarship initiated in the thirties with Carl Grabo's A Newton among Poets and The Magic Plant and which is still going on. These books began to explore the symbolism, scientific and Platonic, underlying the apparently lax imaginative habits of Shelley's work, and showed that many of what had previously seemed mere flights of fancy needed to be read with sharp attention. The poet's idealized but much battered life was restored to earthly uses by Newman Ivey White's biography Shelley (1947); and Kenneth Neill Cameron's studies including The Young Shelley: Genesis of a Radical (1951), established the toughness and sanity of Shelley's developing political thought. Finally (though this is more controversial) C. E. Pulos, in The Deep Truth (1954), has attached Shelley's 'philosophy' to

The sceptical tradition where it surely belongs, so that the exasperating rift between the poet's determinist materialism and his Platonism now begins to disappear. Meanwhile critical emphasis has shifted decisively towards the urbane and the colloquial in Shelley's writing, and towards its hitherto unsuspected techniques of irony. The hypnotic influence has been in the critics as much as in Shelley's verse: it is extraordinary what one doesn't notice if one is continually assured it isn't there.

This is to mention only the most important in an impressive series of such 'revaluations'. Yet this transformation of attitude (in our own country, at least) seems to have gone on in almost complete isolation from the ordinary reader of Shelley—an odd contrast to what happened in the cases of, say, Donne, or Lawrence, where academic rehabilitation and enthusiastic reading emerged as part of the same impulse, scholars encouraged (and restrained) by the unexpected aliveness of their author, and readers taking the new enlightenment to their books. So now Shelley criticism risks the same danger of uncontrolled soaring that has weakened the poetry.

One reason for the contrast, of course, is that practically all the significant writings on Shelley since the thirties have been American, are not always easy to get hold of, and are increasingly expensive. Carlos Baker's important study Shelley's Major Poetry: The Fabric of a Vision, cost five dollars in 1948; the new variorum Prometheus Unbound costs fifteen; while the forthcoming volumes of material from the Pforzheimer collection are going to cost something like a hundred. The last two are the tools of understanding rather than understanding itself; but tools as costly as this are not likely to be at everyone's hand. Some effort to mediate between the new scholarship and readers outside America is all the more essential, and this is what makes popular essays on Shelley like Stephen Spender's pamphlet and D. W. Harding's essay² so regrettable. It is hard to know what to say about the latter, which a generation of English readers is likely to take as the latest

¹ Writers and Their Work Series, 1952.

² The Pelican Guide to English Literature, ed. Boris Ford, 1957, v. 207-19.

thing on Shelley, although it cites only Revaluation (1936) and Mario Praz's specialised classic of decadence, The Romantic Agony (1933), and is based almost obsessively on these. Reading it is like reading Johnson on Gray, or Chesterton on Blake—earnest stuff, all of it, directed towards a carefully defined position in literary space; the snag is that the subject just isn't there any longer. The distance it has moved in the last twenty-five years can be seen in the survey of Shelley literature from about 1900 in the Modern Language Association of America's The English Romantic Poets: A Review of Research (1956), which doesn't mention Revaluation at all.

Besides John Holloway's admirably balanced little essay in his Selected Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley (1960), two recent books help to bridge the gap. Shelley: his Thought and Work (1960), by Desmond King-Hele, himself a scientist, is an excellent general introduction to Shelley—the only modern introduction there is; it combines an intelligent liking for the poet with an up-to-date and level-headed awareness of what has been written about him and his poetry during the last three decades. As a Pelican it would do a lot of good, but instead it costs two guineas and will therefore miss the readers who most deserve and need it. P. H. Butter's Shelley's Idols of the Cave (1954), though much more one-sided, resumes and modifies some of the pioneer studies in Shelley's symbolism. For without interested and informed commonsense. such specialised studies will either go too far or will miss the obvious, and the general reader will suffer. A couple of minor examples may illustrate this. Butter rightly disclaims any reference to iodine in the lines from Prometheus Unbound about the dull weed some sea-worm battens on (IV, 539-42). The test in every such case must be: does it make the poem better? And here it doesn't: Shelley might have known of iodine, but he could not have known whether an iodine-swallowing sea-worm would batten on it, or would yell, gasp, and be abolished, so that iodine would simply be pointless in this context. The poem must govern all such speculations, or the twenty-first century will be looking for a Poet among Newtons. On the other hand Butter expects something too profound in doubting if the violet had any definite

symbolic significance for Shelley, as he says the pansy had; a violet is a pansy, and the name 'Ianthe' (Shelley's first child and the heroine of Queen Mab) derives from the Greek for it.

The investigation of Shelley's language, of his handling of words, is still one of the chief desiderata of criticism, although vague impressionist generalisations about it are fairly common (not least in Leavis and Butter). And here another need becomes apparent. The prerequisite for critical understanding of any author is a reasonable certainty that the words on the page were really written, and were meant to stay written, by that author; the text, that is, must be a sound one. The present state of Shelley's text is very roughly as follows: most of the shorter poems (e.g. 14 out of the 22 lyrics in Palgrave's Golden Treasury) were either album stanzas circulated in several different versions, or lines salvaged from draft notebooks after Shelley's death. All the latter are more or less corrupt as printed; the former need critical editing to determine the best text. Some longer fragments (such as 'Charles I', 'The Triumph of Life') are also from manuscript and also corrupt; The Boat on the Serchio, for instance, still lacks a subversive passage dropped by Mary Shelley when she prepared her edition of Posthumous Poems in 1824. Until 1955 it was at least assumed that Mary Shelley's edition of 1839 was a safer text than that of 1824, but Dr. C. H. Taylor's brilliant little study The Early Collected Editions of Shelley's Poems (1958) proves that what she sent to the press in 1839 were inadequately corrected copies of two earlier pirated editions of the poems, whose errors have thus survived to our own day. (Even those poems Taylor reasonably exempts from blame are not necessarily blameless: the 1839 variants of 'The Triumph of Life', though they all look improvements, are mostly corruptions.) Small matters, perhaps; but they can make a lot of difference. Historians are still scratching their heads to identify 'Time's worst statute' in the twelfth line of 'England in 1819', only because the sonnet is printed from Mary Shelley's transcript instead of from Shelley's fair copy.

There remain the poems printed by Shelley in Italy or England (The Cenci, Prometheus Unbound), and those not actually printed

but written out for printing (The Mask of Anarchy, Julian and Maddalo). Even these offer problems. For example, there is a well-known late draft of Prometheus, better in some respects than the first printed edition. Which is 'the text'? And what about passages (some of them of great interest) which were not written out in the final versions of unpublished poems, such as Julian and Maddalo, and Peter Bell the Third? Criticism is precarious so long as it is uncertain exactly what the poet wrote; and what is true of the poetry is also broadly true of the prose. No other great Romantic poet is in quite as bad a case.

A start has been made on improving this situation. Neville Rogers in Shelley at Work (1956), though far from reliable in transcription, has usefully initiated the study of the draft notebooks. A more direct assault on the text has been L. J. Zillman's colossal variorum edition of Prometheus Unbound (1959), a volume costing £6 and about as thick as a book can be without actually causing its readers to try and open the spine in mistake for the front cover. In many ways this is a most useful compilation, scrupulously prepared; the critical apparatus, variorum notes, draft passages, and contemporary reviews, will all be welcome to specialists. But in aiming to incorporate every possible scholarly gadget, the book goes well over the borderline of pedantry. Appendix F, for instance, provides a cram synopsis of the characters in the drama by collecting every 'characterising statement' made about them in the poem. So we get this, on Mercury:

1. He is Jove's world-wandering herald, but pities Prometheus, is forced to oppose him, and urges him to submit to Jupiter and dwell among the gods. I.325, 354-435.

Well, so he is and says; but the unctuous hypocrisy of this very modern parasite, recognised by the savage irony of Prometheus's retort to him ('Pity the self-despising slaves of Heaven, Not me') and in the sardonic parallel with Milton's Uriel—all, in fact, that is of the slightest use to know about Mercury's character—is completely missed by Zillman's summary. The other incomprehensible weakness of the book is that despite the huge scale of its

operations, the editor could not at any time during its seven years' writing manage to consult the Oxford originals of his microfilms, so that, as the *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer has pointed out, a large number of draft lines were neglected and others were naturally found defeating (it hardly needs 'the best efforts of many minds' to see, in the original, that the two undeciphered words mentioned on p. 651 are 'Qterly Review', while Shelley's pencilstub drafts can sometimes only be interpreted in silhouette, like Celtic fields in low sunlight). The text printed is that of the first edition, verbatim; ironically, therefore, the one thing this all-inclusive edition does not give is a good text of the poem. Nevertheless its value as raw material will be considerable.

The work of re-editing the whole of Shelley is a lifetime's labour for one man, and no single new text, however careful, is likely to be accepted in every detail. A process of checking and assimilating is unavoidable. The best service that can be done to Shelley, therefore, and to the next editor of his *Collected Works*, is for this process to get under way as soon as possible; but we cannot afford to wait for new texts before the common reader is allowed to learn what is going on. We don't want to miss an exciting and sometimes very great poet because critics are out of date and readers have no money.

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Keats and The Young Lovers

ROGER SHARROCK

Keats is a poet who has always held an important place among the authors studied at school between the ages of fourteen and seventeen. The inexorable tide of literary revaluation that flowed out from Russell Square and Cambridge after 1920 has left many features of the school English curriculum totally unsubmerged, and one of them is the appreciation of Keats as a poet of verbal felicity and sensuous evocativeness. Freshmen still come up knowing more of Keats than of the metaphysicals or Pope, and finding him more accessible. This is because they have met him in the years of early adolescence when one first begins to enjoy poetry, though one's enjoyment is usually confined to an intoxicating pleasure in the sound of words and in the visual and other sensuous impressions they can create. Lines and short passages exhibiting this power to render sensation crowd into the mind:

... divine liquids come with odorous ooze Through the cool serpent-pipe refreshfully.

Cool'd a long age in the deep-delvéd earth.

The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eyes.

It keeps eternal whisperings around Desolate shores . . .

Of course, Shakespeare and Marlowe and many other poets can provide for the reader this purely sensuous pleasure; but the distinguishing mark of Keats is that when it is derived from his work the reader may feel that this is the main quality his poems

have to offer and that they have no deeper meaning beyond the stimulation of our senses by the rendering of full and exquisite sensation.

However there must always be a difference between what we expect from sensation and what from the poetic treatment of sensation; otherwise, unless a criterion of pure mimicry were employed, it would always be preferable to savour the scents and appearances, the rounded fruit, drowsy poppies, oozing ciderpress and so on, of an autumn day, to reading Keats's Autumn, which would then give a new turn to the Platonic condemnation of what is but a shadow of a shade. But Keats offers something much more serious and self-contained than a mere hedonistic machine, a delightful word-model of certain sensory experiences. The vivid picturing is not separable from a valuing comment implied by the concrete detail of his evocation. Autumn accumulates particular sensations in order to present a complex atmosphere—in fact, a spirit of autumn, and that is why the spirit is personified in the second stanza:

Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook Spares the next swath and all its twinéd flowers.

and this insight into the nature of fruitfulness serves in its turn, beyond the purely descriptive, as a statement about maturity, the autumn of the mind and of the artist to which Keats aspires.

Critics have sometimes ignored this distinction between experience and poetry; in any case, the attitude to sensuous experience in the early Keats, at once yearning and cloying, has upset many tastes from the *Quarterly* to Matthew Arnold and beyond:

The soul is lost in pleasant smotherings...
O Chatterton how very sad thy fate!

These descents into cocksure banality or the mawkishly sentimental seem equally bad, and the academic critic or professional reviewer, with his English sixth sense for an error in class tone, enlists the aid of biographical knowledge to make his indictment the more damning: quite apart from the defects of his literary education, Keats was mastered and enslaved by a pining, degrading lovesickness for a very ordinary girl who flirted with mustachioed officers a foot taller than he was and caused him bitter distress.

distress.

Now Keats's modern defenders and expositors have eloquently pleaded his cause against these charges of immaturity. Whether within the academy by Clarence D. Thorpe and C. L. Finney, or outside it by Middleton Murry, he has been taken more and more seriously as a poet distinguished by his profound and anguished effort towards self-development. He is commended for the rapidity with which he outgrew his early mawkishness and gradually increased his control over verse and language; he is seen, especially by Middleton Murry, as having finally achieved a knowledge of himself and of the poetic life which enabled him to contemplate in a clear-eyed fashion the mystery of life and death and to communicate his insight.

But to excuse Keats from immaturity and at the same time to

But to excuse Keats from immaturity and at the same time to ask us to accept him as the supreme artist of growth and development is to take over the terminology of his adverse critics and therefore to share their error. The error is to assume that as a result of any sound development of his art and outlook Keats put away not merely childish things but all the impulses and interests of his youth; it is to equate adolescence with delinquency and to stoop to the present-day vulgarity which makes 'adult' generally admitted as a term of critical praise. A maturing attitude to literature should mean widening and deepening an original perception, not 'growing out of' it, which would imply the abandonment of what in Keats's phrase had been proved upon our pulses. Admittedly development and the strain towards it is everywhere in Keats: the faery forest of Spenserian romance is passed to reach a new understanding of Shakespearian tragedy, conceived as a purgatorial experience for the soul; the greater beauty of the Olympians succeeds the lesser beauty of the Titans;

¹ John Middleton Murry, Keats and Shakespeare, 1925; Clarence D. Thorpe, The Mind of John Keats, 1926; Claude Lee Finney, The Evolution of Keats's Poetry, 1936.

Hyperion itself has to undergo a revision which sets it in the more truthful framework of a personal vision. But even in the finest work of 1819 Keats never transcends the concern with immediacy that marks his poetry in the phase now branded as adolescent. The Odes are only a richer brooding over immediacy. Where the Jacobean poet could savour with an intellectual finality:

The poor benefit of a bewildering minute,

Keats felt all the poignancy and none of the poverty of the isolated moment of intense experience; all his poetry is haunted by the problem of how to retain or prolong the moment or how to reconcile it with the oppression of mortal life:

> A sense of real things comes doubly strong, And, like a muddy stream, would bear along My soul to nothingness.

Any evidence that Keats solved his problem so as to be able to present a matured wisdom, call it negative capability or what you will, is to be found in snatches in the letters, and not at all in his

poems.

What I wish to maintain, against both the denigrators of Keats and those who proclaim his maturity, is that he remains in his most characteristic works not just the supreme poet for adolescents, but supremely the adolescent poet. He appeals to the emotions where they are connected most closely with the immediate satisfaction of the senses; the appeal is most strongly concentrated on the emotions of immature sexual love, both powerfully sensual and intensely idealistic, a focus for all sorts of budding curiosity and aspiration. Because Keats was a very exceptional adolescent he was aware of the heady, feverish pressure of this youthful romantic sickness on his imagination; he describes it admirably in the Preface to Endymion:

The imagination of a boy is healthy, and the mature imagination of a man is healthy; but there is a space of life between, in which the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted: thence proceeds mawkishness, and all the thousand bitters which those men I speak of must necessarily taste in going over the following pages.

He projects into poetry the desires and cravings, at once timid and passionate, of 'Mister John Keats five feet high'; the poems in which he writes about youthful love, first love whether satisfied or frustrated, happy or tragic, are Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes and Lamia. They span the main working period and the annus mirabilis, and it is only Lamia that was written after his love affair with Fanny Brawne had begun; thus in the first two of these poems he is creating the facts and discoveries of first love out of his imagination. The kind of self-indulgence so richly and beautifully carried out in these poems is far removed from the impersonality of the poet of negative capability; it is also to be distinguished from the mere pouring out of personal emotion, since Keats is not by any means transcribing from his own experience but capturing by a supreme effort of the imagination love and the lover as he would wish them to be, and re-creating the truths of passion as he does so; in such a process self-indulgence is turned into a discipline.

Each of the three poems is a variation on the same basic theme. A pair of young lovers is set down in the middle of a cold and hostile adult world; the warm sincerity of their passion is contrasted with the unfeeling sterility of their elders who are engaged in the pursuit of power or family pride, or in submitting to the restraints of material prudence. They enjoy their brief happiness in a secret retreat, the 'bower of hyacinth and musk Unknown of any' where Lorenzo meets Isabella, or the chamber of Madeline situated far away from the hall where hostile kinsmen revel and reached 'Through many a dusky gallery', or the enchanted palace built for Lamia in Corinth. A whole series of minor contrasts between light and darkness, warmth and cold, rich colours and drab tones, youth and age, serve to develop in contrapuntal form the fundamental opposition between romantic love and its enemies.

The treatment of the basic theme differs considerably from poemto poem, so that a different blending of the same structural elements shifts the emotional emphasis in each case and produces a different attitude to romantic love. *Isabella* is a tragedy in which

¹ Cf. Letters of John Keats, ed. M. Buxton Forman, 2nd ed. 1935, pp. 192-3.

Lorenzo is murdered and Isabella dies of grief; The Eve of St. Agnes alone of the three poems presents happy and fulfilled love, though even here the pair who are allowed to flee away into the estorm are placed in time 'ages long ago' and it is 'an elfin storm from faery land' which effects their escape: their happiness is to some extent artistically distanced and framed as an ideal model of romantic love rather than a possible state (though warm and breathing in Madeline's bedroom, they have become 'phantoms' as they glide away). In Lamia an ambiguity enters which marks it off a little from the other two poems; the nature of Lamia, both woman and demon, proclaims a love that is both desirable and deceitful, and though there is present the same opposition of youthful passion and harsh adult values, the grown-up world is now shown to have reason on its side in the person of 'the sage, old Apollonius'; it may be deplored as the analytic and destructive discursive reason, but its truth is not denied.

These variations of emphasis, as well as producing very different comments on the nature of love, are related to very different types of narrative style. This is why what may seem a highly obvious thematic unity has been obscured by the varied emotional atmosphere created in each poem. An examination poem by poem reveals these different styles of narration and the attitudes they present, as the adolescent mind guesses and gropes its way into the world of love, posing at each stage the same question: how can romantic love be possible in a harsh grown-ups' world?

Of the three, *Isabella*, the earliest, remains furthest from the world of love; love is seen as the highest value and therefore the most fitting subject for poetry, but the poem that ensues is a self-conscious exercise in sentiment. In this connection it is interesting to see that Keats soon came to recognise the artificiality of its love-melancholy, attributing to it 'an amusing sober-sadness' and concluding that it was 'a weak-sided poem' only too 'smokeable' by the reviewers of the *Quarterly*.¹ Its manner, working through the slow and decorative stanza, is diffuse and luxuriant; a brief tragic tale from Boccaccio is presented at one remove so as

¹ Letters of John Keats, ed. cit., p. 391.

to extract the last drop of sentimental pathos. The first embrace of the lovers reveals a view of life that would contain experience within the bounds of 'poesy':

So said, his erewhile timid lips grew bold, And poesied with hers in dewy rhyme: Great bliss was with them, and great happiness Grew, like a lusty flower in June's caress.

The image suggests that the kiss exists in order that a poet may write about it; it also suggests that love is a mode of poetry conceived as a state of luxurious contemplation beyond the cares of the ordinary world. A graceful and accomplished artifice of sorrow is imposed on the story; there is a kind of self-conscious tuning-up of the poetry to make it equal to contain the theme:

O Melancholy, linger here awhile!
O Music, Music, breathe despondingly!
O Echo, Echo, from some sombre isle,
Unknown, Lethean, sigh to us—O sigh!

The method may be described as a rhetorical lyricism. There are frequent apostrophes like those above and those to 'sad Melpomene' and to 'eloquent and famed Boccaccio', and many highly mannered repetitions and declamations. The management of some of these rhetorical constructions is very beautiful, for instance, the description of Isabella's grief, a variation on the word 'forgot':

And she forgot the stars, the moon, the sun,
And she forgot the blue above the trees,
And she forgot the dells where waters run,
And she forgot the chilly autumn breeze:
She had no knowledge when the day was done,
And the new moon she saw not...

Sorrow is stylised like a mourning figure on an urn. The long declamatory passages disperse the emotion and cause it to cling to detached, pictorial moments of the story. A repetitive series of questions fruitlessly probes the origins of the brothers' commercial

and family pride which has made them decide to dispose of their sister's lover ('Why were they proud?...'): this might seem an unwarranted digression in a tauter, less lyrical form of narrative; even the brilliant evocation of the Florentine capitalists' exploited slaves in every corner of the earth might seem to run away from the main narrative into vivid, side-tracking word-pictures:

For them the Ceylon diver held his breath And went all naked to the hungry shark.

and the tone of overwrought indignation seems equally to be at variance with or at least to complicate the emotional atmosphere already established. But in the pattern of balanced contrasts Keats has chosen for his form this digression on the materialism of the brothers provides the dark background of the uncomprehending adult world that is needed to throw into relief the pure unspoilt love of Lorenzo and Isabella; and the feverishly reiterated questions further make plain that the young themselves cannot comprehend the motives behind the crass misunderstanding of their elders.

All is distanced and softened. The slightly quaint mannerism of the imagery contributes to the general effect of sentimental pathos not so much contrived as tamed ('Isabella's cheek/Fell sick within the rose's just domain'; 'those Baalites of pelf'). The intense and dramatic prolepsis of:

So the two brothers and their murder'd man Rode past fair Florence,

only serves, by reminding us of the starkly tragic narrative, to reveal how much it has been transformed into a rhetorical lyric. Even the ghastly business of the severed, loam-stained head and its morbid retention is turned with great skill to favour and to prettiness.

To turn to *The Eve of St. Agnes* is to pass from diffuseness to intensity; the narrative is again wrought up to the pitch of lyric in the flow and throb of its emotion, but the method is richly descriptive, not declamatory, and everything contributes to the

isolation of the central figures, splendid in their romantic passion against the dark background of their elders' hatred, cold hearts in a cold season. Though apparently loaded with descriptive detail, evocation of the atmosphere of the medieval castle, architectural fancies and the like, none of the pictorial passages is merely decorative and all contribute to the perpetual tension between youth and age, life and death, warmth and cold, that make up the musical harmony of the poem. Keats was clearly inspired by the similar musical pattern in Romeo and Juliet and this has not passed unnoticed; 'Angela the old' recalls the Nurse; her age and weakness is several times emphasised, until in the conclusion she dies 'palsy-twitched with meagre face deform', and like Shakespeare's Nurse she has a coarse-mindedness which is ready to attribute the worst motives to Porphyro's desire to be guided to Madeline's room: the treatment of the Nurse in both works throws into relief the pure ardour of the young lovers. The Beadsman too, 'meagre, barefoot, wan', leads his life even further away from the sources of love and passion, among the sculptured dead:

Emprison'd in black purgatorial rails.

His appearance at the beginning of the poem provides for a double contrast: first the silver snarling trumpets suddenly break upon this universe of death and penance; they usher in a lively but unfeeling and superficial world; it has colour but no inner life and is described in words suggesting heraldic colours or armorial bearing ('argent revelry') and some of its chief members are also old or deformed ('dwarfish Hildebrand', 'that old Lord Maurice, not a whit More tame for his gray hairs'). Then comes the genuine passion of Porphyro and Madeline; they and what belongs to them are described in rich natural colour terms, usually those of crimson and the rose:

Sudden a thought came like a full-blown rose, Flushing his brow.

¹ See R. K. Gordon, 'Notes on Keats's Eve of St. Agnes', Modern Language Review, xli, 1946, pp. 413–19.

The stained glass of Madeline's casement is coloured like the wings of the tiger-moth and its emblazonings blush with the blood of

queens and kings.

This is not the tentative calf-love of *Isabella* but a fully consummated passion. The lovers lie at the warm heart of the castle, secure from the physical and moral coldness outside; the poem is built up like a Ptolemaic universe of spheres: we move from the utter chill of the natural world, the hare in the frozen grass, to the Beadsman in the chapel, too old and austere for love, then to the revelry in the hall, and finally to the centre of this world of love, Madeline's room, her bed, and Madeline in it. There is then a movement outwards from the warm centre through the enclosing layers when the lovers escape into the night.

As it is the most artistically assured of these poems, so is the *Eve* the most confident statement of a happy and realised romantic love; only in the hint of fairy tale at the end is there any withdrawal of the poet from full sympathy to a more detached point of view. In *Lamia* the self-absorption of the lovers is exposed to a far more severe attack from the envy of the adult world. The critical spirit of Apollonius brings about the destruction of romantic passion. But its chief enemy is within; here a radical ambiguity appears, not present in the earlier poems. Love is seen as at once exquisite and fatal, not running into danger from external forces, but bearing the seeds of death within itself; it is not only fatal, but has about it a quality of corruption. Lamia is a demon as well as a woman.

The adolescent quest, shifting from poem to poem, for some way of establishing the values of passionate love in the hostile adult world, here meets with disillusion. But Lamia would be easier to understand if it were simply a poem on the recurring romantic theme of the fatal passion leading to madness and death, like La Belle Dame Sans Merci. However Keats still clings uneasily to the only hand-hold he has, though he sees it must give way. Lamia is both piteously beautiful and utterly false. Apollonius is at one and the same time the voice of truth and wisdom and a waspish disagreeable old pedant; in the structure of the poem he fills the role

of Angela, the Beadsman, and Isabella's brothers in its predecessors. Keats sees truth itself as inimical to happiness; romantic love is a personal discovery of value and a surrender to phantoms:

Do not all charms fly At the mere touch of cold philosophy?

The use of Newtonian science to illustrate the working of the adult critical spirit is apt: the discursive reason cannot be contradicted, but it entails an emotional impoverishment; after all, it is the work of this 'cold philosophy', not the sweet falsehood of Lamia, which brings about Lycius's death.

The imaginative intensity of these poems, particularly the *Eve*, would not have been possible without the assumption that romantic passion is the principal source of moral and spiritual values, because it is most productive of moments of finely perceptive sympathy when a 'sort of oneness' can be experienced. In his effort to ground human life upon personal values Keats looks forward through a long succession of nineteenth century and modern writers. The world gives neither certitude nor peace, then:

Ah, love, let us be true To one another!

as Arnold says in *Dover Beach*, and the heroes and heroines of E. M. Forster are saying the same thing in their search for happiness through personal relations. Meanwhile at the popular level the modern myth of romantic passion throws a huge shadow. It seems likely that these youthful poems of Keats will remain the finest poetic expression of the myth.

Francis Thompson

PETER BUTTER

TRANCIS THOMPSON'S reputation has veered between the Theights and the depths, and is still not securely established. Mr. Grigson thinks that he wrote 'extraordinary nonsense with extraordinary incompetence (in most of his poems)';1 and I suppose this is only an extreme statement of the predominant critical opinion. His failings—over-ornate diction, pretentious and sometimes imprecise imagery, lack of structure and of contact with physical realities are those which are most disliked, and his virtues do not include those, such as irony, which are most admired by leading critics. On the other hand some-not only his coreligionists, for they include W. B. Yeats-have thought him a great poet; and he is still relatively popular among ordinary readers of poetry. Must we now accept the verdict that he may be safely forgotten, or does the continued allegiance of readers point to his possession of qualities that may be all the more valuable to us because they are unfashionable?

I

M. Pierre Danchin has spent ten years on Thompson and has produced a book of over 500 pages² which presents clearly and systematically a great mass of information about him. In the first part he makes skilful use of Thompson's notebooks and other sources to give us a more complete and accurate account of his life, especially of his later years, than any previous biographer has done. He adds some interesting facts to our knowledge, and

¹ The Observer, 2 January 1955.

² Francis Thompson: La Vie et l'Oeuvre d'un Poète, 1959, Nizet, 28 n.f.

corrects some errors (for instance, he reveals that Maggie Brien, Thompson's friend at Pantasaph, was twenty-five in 1895, not, as Mr. Reid, following others, says, an 'adolescent'). His straightforward and modest kind of biography which leaves the reader to do his own psycho-analysing is the kind which I like best; but some may consider his attitude to his sources too uncritical. He accepts without question, for instance, Thompson's own accounts (in Sister Songs, in conversation with Blunt, etc.) of his years on the London streets, including his attempted suicide and his friend-ship with his golden-hearted young girl of the streets. One cannot be sure, but sceptics may well be right in suspecting some mixture of fantasy and of literary reminiscence (from De Quincey) with fact here, as in other of Thompson's memories.

The rest of M. Danchin's book falls into two main parts, the first considering what Thompson has to say about the subjects which most interested him, the second how he says it (including examination of his imagery, diction, metre, etc.). M. Danchin is always patient and scholarly. He brings to bear a considerable knowledge of the relevant Catholic literature. His book will be of great value to lovers of Thompson who want to know all the facts about him and his work and who need help in interpreting him. As a work of criticism, however, it is not altogether satisfying. The weakness of his method is that he never examines a poem as a whole; a poem's content is summarised in one chapter, its literary qualities are considered in a number of others. He makes some interesting points, however. He argues that, though Thompson's work changed and developed, the thought behind it was consistent, that the poetry is firmly based upon the poet's own experience, his own special insights, and is not nearly so derivative as some have supposed. He demonstrates the density of Thompson's thought, and argues that his oddities and obscurities are often due to efforts to express complex meanings in a concentrated way. He is, in general, right about these things; but he does not examine the text with enough discrimination to show when the alleged complex meanings are adequately embodied in the words. His criticism is too fragmentary, and not rigorous enough.

Η

Mr. Reid's book1 is less informative, but contains more interesting criticism. He is sympathetic towards his subject, but does not try to minimise his failings. Thompson constantly sought to escape from the responsibilities of adult life into a world of fantasy. His drug-addiction was caused by this basic weakness rather than being the cause of it (though, of course, it accentuated it). His inconsiderate behaviour to his parents and others, his isolation, his choosing of women to love who could not return his love and so make a claim on him-all these are signs of the same irresponsibility, the same escapism. But this is not the whole truth. No mere weak-willed dreamer could have won the respect as well as the affection of such people as Patmore, the Meynells and Archbishop Kenealy. He had a core of spiritual strength which enabled him to pass through his sufferings and three years as a London tramp with unstained sweetness of character. He was a man of high intelligence, and had more than ordinary vision of spiritual realities. No one was more conscious than himself of the incongruity between what the visionary poet saw and what the man did. The poems came out of the tension between two sides of himself, and contain a similar mixture of strength and weakness. His literary vices are connected with the neurotic dreamer side of him; the stronger, barer style of his best work shows his capacity to struggle free of self-pity and fantasy. As Mr. Reid puts it:

There were...two poets in Thompson; and just as the contradictions in his character proceed from a clash between the weak-willed and the insistently innocent sides of him, so the two types of poetry he wrote show on the one hand the escapist, evasive, egocentric Thompson, and on the other the deeply religious man conscious of the claims of life, of duty, of others. The second Thompson was the truly poetic one; the other a talented adolescent aping the manners of his favourite poets.

Mr. Reid's book is, I think, the best-balanced criticism of Thompson that has been written, though I would tilt the balance rather more in Thompson's favour than he does. He discards the

¹ J. C. Reid, Francis Thompson: Man and Poet, 1959, Routledge and Kegan Paul.

great bulk of the poems as the work of the weaker Thompson, retaining only a few such as 'The Hound of Heaven', 'The Mistress of Vision', 'All Flesh', 'A Fallen Yew', 'Contemplation' and 'In No Strange Land'. I think he rather overstates the influence of opium on the 'Ode to the Setting Sun' and 'Orient Ode', and under-rates also 'From the Night of Forebeing' and 'An Anthem of Earth'. It is not really possible to make any neat division between the work of the two Thompsons. The greater grew out of the struggle with the weaker, and we cannot have the one without the other. Not so very many of the poems are quite worthless, though very few are entirely satisfying as wholes. In nearly all there are signs of literary and spiritual weakness, but in nearly all there are efforts to overcome these things. Mr. Reid, following others, overstates the derivativeness of Thompson's poetry. Few of the poems are without at least some passages which bear the unmistakable mark of his individual way of thinking and feeling; few could possibly have been written by any one else.

III

Even in the best of the long odes, 'The Hound of Heaven', the two sides of Thompson are both present. The first three stanzas deal with the poet's flight from the love of God which seems to make too great claims upon him. He seeks refuge in the thoughts and emotions of his own mind, in human love, in external nature, in children, and then (in the latter part of stanza 3) returns to nature. This return is not a needless repetition, as may at first appear; for the two passages on nature describe different experiences, belonging to different periods of his life. In the first, probably as a boy, he is simply ignored; in the second, referring to a more recent time, his wooing of external things at first seems more successful:

I in their delicate fellowship was one...
I triumphed and I saddened with all weather,
Heaven and I wept together...

He is expressing here rather a weak and sentimental mood in which he self-consciously cultivated the pathetic fallacy and

imagined a response from nature which she is not able to give. His failing as a poet is that when he expresses such a mood, even if only to transcend it later, he tends to let the standard of the writing drop, as in:

Let me twine with you caresses,
Wantoning
With our Lady-Mother's vagrant tresses,
Banqueting
With her in her wind-walled palace,
Underneath her azured dais,
Quaffing, as your taintless way is,
From a chalice
Lucent - weeping out of the dayspring.

A greater poet might have been able to inject an undercurrent of irony under the sentimentality, so as to prepare us for the rejection of it in the stronger lines:

For, ah! we know not what each other says,

These things and I; in sound I speak—

Their sound is but their stir, they speak by silences.

And, having reached this point, a greater poet would not have relapsed into the rather infantile:

Nature, poor stepdame, cannot slake my drouth;

Let her, if she would owe me,

Drop yon blue bosom-veil of sky, and show me

The breasts o' her tenderness.

Something rather similar happens in the next stanza, in which the soul no longer flees, but does not yet accept the love of God with any joy. It knows its own nothingness before God, but still apprehends Him primarily as the jealous God, who has deprived it of what it has wanted. The rather peevish self-pity contained in this stanza is unexpected after 'Naked I wait Thy love's uplifted stroke', but is dramatically right; it is here only in order to be worked through and denied. But he again gives way too

much to his mood, writes in a weak way when expressing weakness:

And now my heart is as a broken fount,
Wherein tear-drippings stagnate, spilt down ever
From the dank thoughts that shiver
Upon the sighful branches of my mind.

This self-pity is transcended in the last lines of the stanza, in which the vision of death (including death to self as well as physical death) leads him to an inner acceptance in place of a mere despairing giving up of the struggle, and finally to an apprehension of God as love, expressed in strong and precise images and words:

That voice is round me like a bursting sea ... 'Lo, all things fly thee, for thou fliest Me' ... 'I am He whom Thou seekest.'

The weaknesses in this poem, as usual in Thompson, are contained within a context in which they are overcome, and the literary and the spiritual weaknesses are connected.

I have suggested, following Mr. Reid, that Thompson's spiritual victories are signalised in a stronger, plainer style than we usually associate with him. This is on the whole true; but one cannot deny that he is characteristically a poet of highly-coloured diction and bold imagery, and so, if one picks out for praise only the barer passages, one can perhaps be accused of admiring him at his least characteristic. I am not sure that modern taste is right to be so suspicious of high colour and obvious splendour. Even some of Thompson's lesser poems (even the, in parts absurd, 'Corymbus for Autumn', for example) have a Dionysian energy and joy behind them which most modern poems, with all their intelligence and control, lack. Take a better poem as example, 'Contemplation'. He first describes a beautiful natural scene on a bright morning after a shower; everything seems to be quiet and at peace:

The river has not any care
The passionless water to the sea to bear;
The leaves have brown content;
The wall to me has freshness like a scent,
And takes half-animate the air,
Making one life with its green moss and stain...

Underneath the stillness great energies lie dormant. This state is compared to that of the soul in contemplation, and especially to that of the poet's mind when, calm and receptive, it is really at its most creative:

No hill can idler be than I; No stone its inter-particled vibration Investeth with a stiller lie...

In poets, as in skies 'Lurk untumultuous vortices of power'.

This is, so far, effective writing. It reveals, and conveys a feeling of, a pattern of energy within calm in nature, in the spiritual life and in the life of the artist. The images are bold, but not out of touch with plain fact. It is literally true that within the apparent stillness of the stone there is movement and great forces are held in balance. Thompson here, and occasionally elsewhere, shows himself one of the few who have made good use in poetry of scientific knowledge. But what about the final stanza in which he tries to express his joy in the power and vision that comes, he believes, to the poet in the stillness of contemplation?

For he, that conduit running wine of song,
Then to himself does most belong
When he his mortal house unbars
To the importunate and thronging feet
That round our corporal walls unheeded beat;...
He round the solemn centre of his soul
Wheels like a dervish, while his being is
Streamed with the set of the world's harmonies,...
And the bold stars does hear,
Every one in his airy soar,
For evermore
Shout to each other from the peaks of space,
As 'thwart ravines of azure shouts the mountaineer.

We may feel inclined to cavil at the poetic diction of 'thwart' and 'azure' and at the violence of some of the images, to object to 'airy soar' and 'shout' as applied to the (to us) circular and silent motion of the stars, to ask whether the final lines mean anything

precise. And yet, I think, this stanza does succeed in its context in conveying a feeling of joy, of exhilaration. The claim made in the last lines is not a mere flourish. To state the matter in his own prose:

The insight of the poet springs from intuition, which is the highest reason, and is acquired by contemplation, which is the highest effort. For contemplation implies a concentration far greater than is needed for ordinary thought . . . The weapon of poet or saint is intuition, and contemplation is the state, the attitude, which disposes the mind to receive intuitions.

His claim to be, at times, 'inspired' is unfashionable, but, to put it no higher, his confidence in his vision gave his work at its best an exhilarating quality. I myself would put it higher; I believe his best work does spring from this 'contemplation which is the highest effort' and does contain insights which make it more valuable than that of some more faultless poets.

One cannot deny that his writing is frequently bad, but he should be judged by his best. Reading him one is led through a fog of fantasies to moments in which deeply felt spiritual experiences are conveyed in strong and precise words.

Notes on Contributors

GEOFFREY LITTLE, a graduate of the University College of North Staffordshire, lectures in the University of Sydney; he previously was Hearne Senior Scholar at St. Edmund Hall, Oxford, and lectured in the University of Melbourne. He is working on the literary theory of Wordsworth and Coleridge.

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BONAMY DOBRÉE was for three years Professor in Cairo, and for twenty years Professor at Leeds University. Though he is best known for his work on the Restoration and the early eighteenth century, he refuses to be restricted to a period, and his *Modern Prose Style* is among his most popular works.

CLIFFORD LEECH is Professor of English in the University of Durham and is the author of Shakespeare's Tragedies and Other Studies in 17th Century Drama, 1950; John Webster: A Critical Study, 1951; John Ford and the Drama of his Time, 1957. He edited two of Mildmay Fane's plays in 1938 and is General Editor of The Revels Plays, 1958. The John Fletcher Plays will appear shortly.

W. H. Petty, a graduate of Cambridge University, is Assistant Education Officer to the West Riding Education Committee and has published No Bold Comfort (poems), 1957.

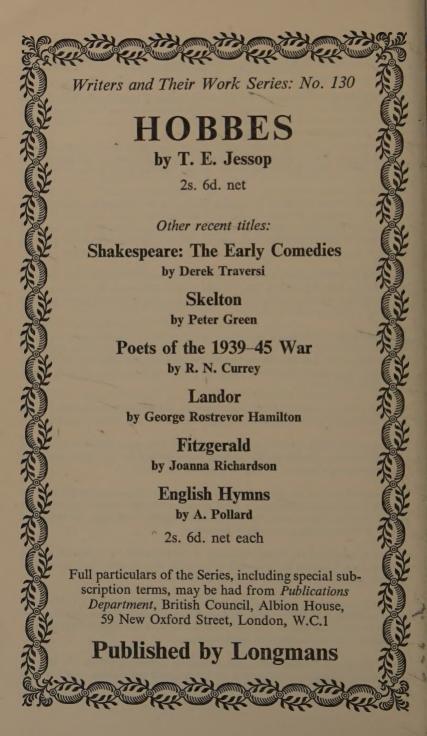
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